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Six National Government Sheets
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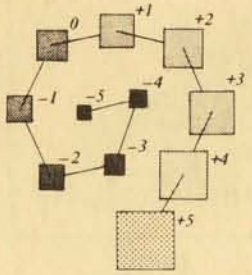


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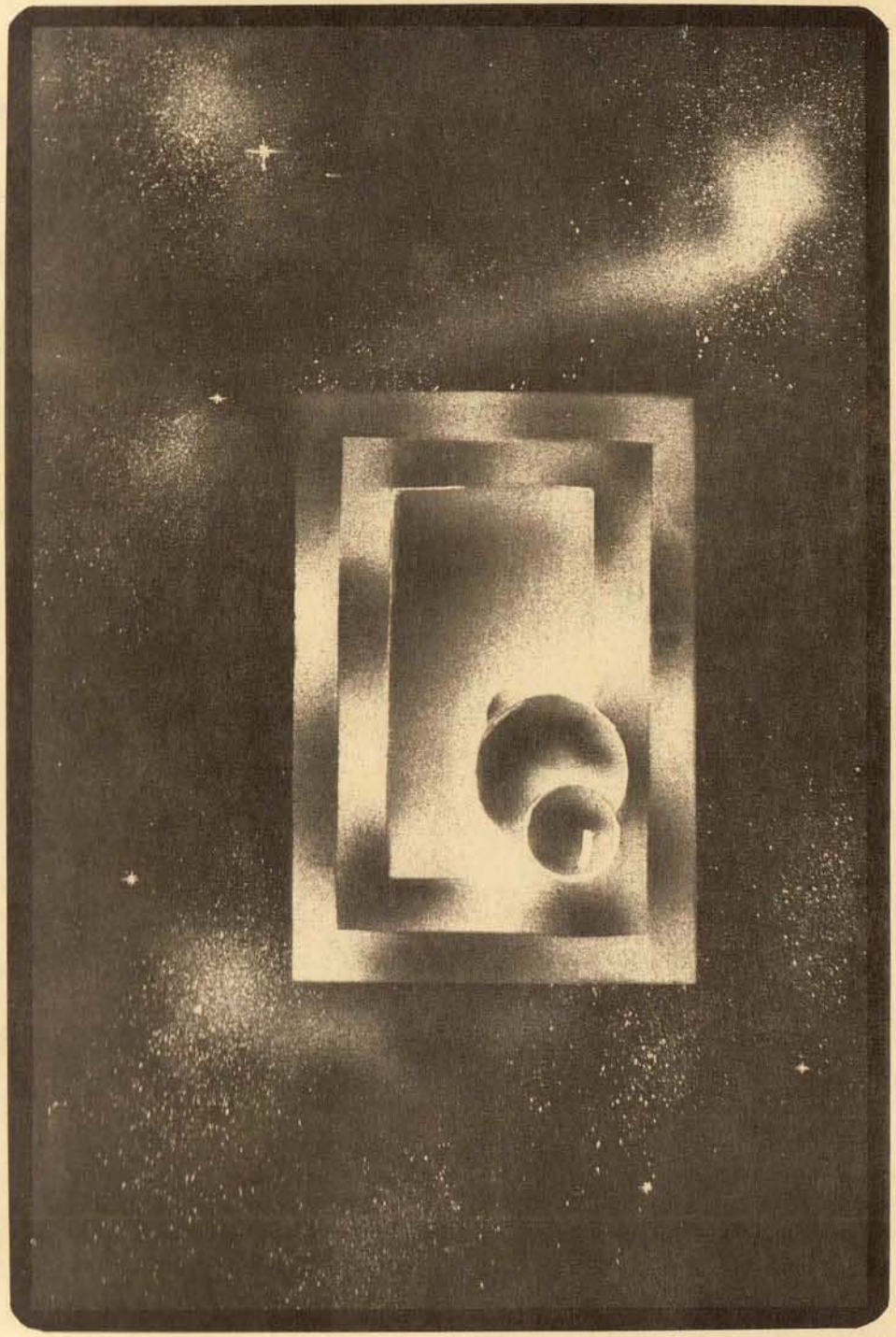

# the SPACE GAMER

## dec-Jan no. 9

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### Where We're Going

As this is written, mid-January, GODSFIRE is being shipped to buyers and OGRE is due back from the printer in 7-10 days. GODSFIRE is a real mind blower for sophistication/complexity buffs. With two 22"x34" space maps, typeset rules booklet with full color cover, 600+ money chits, 1008 combat counters, and 24 assorted System Sheets, National Government Sheets, and Data Sheets, GODSFIRE is B-I-G. It will have an even greater impact on gaming than STELLAR CONQUEST in terms of new factors and methodology.

Good ol' hindsight says GODSFIRE was too much for MGC to try at this stage of our growth. Since we didn't know that, we'll award ourselves 500 experience points for only being six weeks late getting it out. In the seven month period ending in January, MGC has published three new games, MONSTERS! MONSTERS!, GODSFIRE, and OGRE, plus reprinting STELLAR CONQUEST and THE YTHRI with format changes. TSG also went bi-monthly. In terms of time and money, that's like going from zero to now in only seven months.

Lurking in the near wings are two more MicroGames and HYMENOPTERA Yes, HYMENOPTERA will be published as our next big, i.e. $10+, game. There have been design problems (uh, bugs?) arising from the multitude of genetic types we'd like to include. A lot of the types were looking like a more complex combat with 2,000+ counters for six players. Air, ground, and water types were included. Production complexity looked out of hand if a $15 lid on price was to be maintained. The problem is in hand now. And, a bonus of the solution is CHITIN, our second MicroGame. CHITIN I: Harvest Wars is a $2.95 MicroGame abstract of HYMENOPTERA's tactical plains combat system. It will be available around April 1st (not an April Fool's joke).

For those who missed it, let me say again--$2.95 for MicroGames. We've taken a bit of a risk planning for three to four times our normal sales to get that $2.95 volume price. That will include an 8¾x14" heavy paper stock play map, 56-112 counters, and a 16-20 page rules booklet. Exterior packaging will be either plastic baggie or a little "pocket" folder. We tend toward the folder now and cost looks fair for it. The folder would have a two color cover and look pretty slick.

In terms of play value, OGRE, CHITIN, and other MicroGames will be a real bargain. Yeh, you're always told that, but MicroGames are meant to be played, not set on the shelf with you $8-$10 unplayed "collector's" games. The reaction of some 14 play-testers is uniformly, "Let's play another; I think I can get the command post/Ogre this time if....." It may be petty, but some others would put OGRE in a box and charge $7 or $8.

More different games have been worked on in the past eight weeks than at any time in MGC's brief history. GODSFIRE, METASTAR 80, and HYMENOPTERA have all seen major design work. OGRE, CHITIN, ERE-WHON, and WARPWAR have also seen heavy work. Several major promotional activities are also in the works.

1977 will be our first really big groth year. MGC should stand with secondary publishers like GDW, TSR, and Conflict by year end. The spearheads are MicroGames and TSG. Microgames are risky, as said before, but we think they will go. TSG goes for double to triple circulation with a schedule of gradually increasing improvements. More TSG material will be staff generated to give a more even mix. The computer CPU should also be acquired and testing of PBM games begun.

1977 will also see almost all staff/local game designs published. We haven't been idle and you'll see the results of our efforts soon.

Be assured we appreciate the continuing reader support and comment. We're having a lot of fun and see a lot of new projects opening up. Every subscription and game directly advances science fiction and fantasy gaming. Looking back to October, 1974, our shoe string has stretched and grown fantastically. MicroGames, TSG, and computers should see MGC to a rapid take-off in 1977!.

Howard Thompson

# EDITORIAL

SPI BADMOUTHING

WAIT! Before anything, let me say this ISN'T one of those all too frequent Simulation Publications Inc. (SPI) putdowns. SPI, the wargaming/simulation industry leader, is frequently subject to putdowns by gamers and game publication. Badmouthing SPI seems to be a side effect of SPI's success.

For the record, gaming (as we know it) consisted of Avalon Hill (AH) publishing two similar historical games a year prior to SPI. There was no Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), Game Design Workshop (GDW), Simulation Design Corporation (SDC), Conflic , MGC etc; just those two new games a year. Then came Dunnigan/Simonsen with Strategy and Tactics (S&T) with a game in every issue. This had to be one of the strangest market ventures of all time. But, S&T reached 32,000 subscribers and modern gaming exploded with new magazines and companies.

Again, for the record, without SPI and their million dollar advertising budget (total estimated to date) we'd still be getting two (A-H) historical games per year.

Even A-H profited by the SPI boom. Non-mail buyers pushed A-H store sales to new highs largely because of SPI advertising. None of the smaller firms,except some miniatures efforts, would likely exist without SPI. GDW and Conflict started on a hard core specialty type market. That specialty market would have been too small without SPI. TSR, SDC and MGC are others who've benefitted from the larger market SPI created.

So, hear this publishers, SPI created our opportunity. Unless, of course, some of us had a fewhundred thousand for promotion.

A popular pastime among hardcore gamers is badmouthing SPI games. When you publish 30+ games a year some will be clinkers, there's no cost effective help for it. But don't forget the S&T publishers ratings that quickly spot the goofs. SPI gains nothing by pushing a dud. Duds get dropped and replaced by winners.

On average, SPI games are well designed and a solid value buy. Given the occasional bomb, surprisingly many of SPI's games are superb, by any standard. Gamers would be lucky if all game publishers hit the SPI average or put out even one game a year in the SPI "best" league.

Charles Roberts started board wargaming with A-H. SPI stretched it to unprecedented bounds. Other publishers will have to be design innovative and break new marketing ground to stand with SPI/A-H. Doing as SPI and A-H do means you're always a coat-tailer. Followers won't make gaming reach bigger audiences.

TSR has broken new ground with Fantasy gaming. It remains to be seen if TSR drives home their innovation with market know how and steady quality. In my estimate, TSR will make it if they keep improving as they have.

MGC is also trying to break new ground. I'm very much aware that innovation and marketing (selling/advertising, etc.) are the key. SPI is a tough act to follow. You have to keep all the apples juggled; expand a firm, watch cash-flow, design, test, produce, sell, advertise, re-test, etc., etc. You also have to show a profit or your days are numbered. SPI did it, and a lot of others have benefitted.

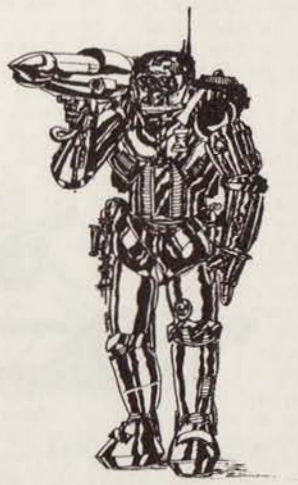
On a competitive level SPI scares hell out of me. They aren't as powerful as IBM in computers but SPI has customers and resources to go nearly anywhere faster and better than anyone but A-H. A-H is, unfortunately, a subsidiary of a larger firm which is like having one foot in a bucket of cement. SPI scares me, but I have to respect them. No other company in gaming is as consistently fair and reliable to deal with. I can just see IBM letting competitors advertise to all their customers as SPI does with S&T.

No, SPI isn't perfect, if all you're willing to measure by is perfection. Maybe all that badmouthing is just gamer envy and ego. Maybe gamers like underdogs, until they succeed. Maybe it's just fun to gripe and SPI is the biggest target. Just remember that without SPI, we'd have an average three month wait from right now for the next A-H game. Maybe we'll get a reissue of CHANCELLORSVILLE this time guys; oh boy, I can't wait.

Howard Thompson



# Designer's Note



TAKE THAT, DICE!!

If it always seems that combat die rolls run against you, we have something in common, aside from, perhaps, a tinge of paranoia. One reason STELLAR CONQUEST allows a builder's game is because dice seem to do me in. If three Attack ships show up at my home colony and I've got three Attacks defending I know I'm likely to lose it. SC lets me build and concentrate that 50% to 100% edge I seem to need for victory.

My poor dice luck was a cause of problems in play-testing OGRE. When you are never sure how you're doing on the die rolls it becomes hard to tell when a scenario is fairly balanced. This testing of OGRE led to what now seems an easy, natural idea. It's a gimmick which allows fair play-testing and (incidently, hah!) leads to the near elimination of imbalanced die rolls. In fact, the idea is such a "natural" I suspect it has been discovered a number of times by other gamers. But, who cares? I don't recall seeing it in print anywhere in the last few years, so it should be new to most TSG readers. And, I know how us poor dicers need all the help we can get.

The gimmick is based on a chit draw for combat die rolls. Each player has a separate pile of chits of equal number with one to six numbers on them. For OGRE I made two sets, writing down one thru six seven times for each set on heavy card stock and then cutting them out. Each player then had 42 chits turned face down and mixed up from which to draw for combat results. As each chit was drawn for a combat it was turned face down in a separate discard pile for each player. This way each player will get the same number of hits and the used chits can't be seen to help a player remember how his odds are running. When a player has used up his starting chit pile, he merely mixes up the discards.and starts with them.

No, this doesn't guarantee completely equal die rolls, especially when players don't fully get through a stack at game end. But, you get so close you know play tactics made the big difference in winning. The number of chits used can be varied according to the game, ie. use the number of likely combats in a game as a guide. Probably you need at least 30 chits, five dice set equivalents, or so for each player so he can't easily remember what he's drawn. I think this chit gimmick will cut our play-testing time in half and we're more sure of what our testing results mean when we've finished. This might also be a neat equalizing idea for tournament play.

So, when your oh-so-lucky-at-dice opponent begins to crow spring this gimmick on him and tell him to get his chits together. Of course, if you're like me, the chits mean you'll forever lose those "damn dice" as your last, and best excuse for not winning.

Howard Thompson

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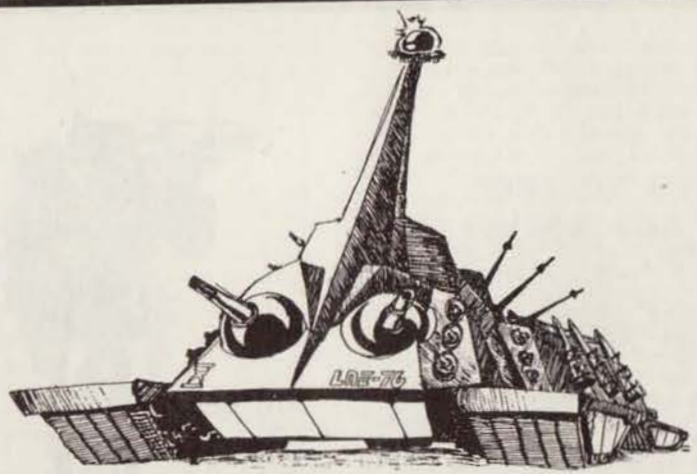


NOTES ON THE OGRE

by Steve Jackson

The command post was well guarded. It should have been. The hastily constructed, unlovely building was the nerve center guiding Paneuropean operations along a 700-kilometer section of front - a front that was pressing steadily toward the largest Combine manufacturing center in the hemisphere.

Therefore, General DePaul had taken no chances. His command was located in the most defensible terrain available - a battered chunk of gravel bounded on three sides by marsh and on the fourth by the river that fed that marsh. The river was deep and wide; the swamp, gluey and impassable. Nothing bigger than a rat could avoid detection by the icons scattered over the island and thirty kilometers in every direction. Even the marsh was watched - even the river surface. The air was secure; three laser batteries had been set up, and were regularly knocking down Combine aircraft and the few missiles that penetrated the jamscreen. And scattered through the twilight, here and there, were the bulky shapes of tanks and ground effect vehicles - the elite 2033rd Armored, almost relaxed as they guarded a spot nothing could attack.

Inside the post, too, the mood was relaxed - except at one monitor station, where a young lieutenant watched a computer map of the island. A light was blinking on the river. Orange: something was moving, out there where nothing should move. No heat. A stab at the keyboard called up a representation of the guardian units...not that any should be out <u>there</u>, twelve kilometers away. None were. Whatever was out there was a stranger - and it was actually <u>in</u> the river. A swimming animal? A man? Ridiculous.

The lieutenant spun a cursor, moving a dot of white light across the map and halting it on the orange spot with practiced ease. He hit another key, and an image appeared on the big screen...pitted ground, riverbank...and something else, something rising from the river like the conning tower of an old submarine, but he knew what it really was, he just couldn't place it...and then it moved. Not straight toward the camera icon, but almost. The lieutenant saw the "conning tower" cut a wake through the rushing water, bounce once, and begin to rise. A second before the whole shape was visible, he recognized it - but for that second he was frozen. And so thirty men with their minds on other things were suddenly brought to heart-pounding alert, as the lieutenant's strangled gasp and the huge image on his screen gave the same warning...

"OGRE!"

■

Every so often you throw logic and reason out the window and do something because you feel like it, regardless of whether it makes any sense. And occasionally, when you're through, it works. That's what happened with OGRE.

Like many people, I'm fascinated by tanks. Nice image: all that compact power and invulnerability. SF stories like Colin Kapp's <u>Gottlos</u> and the Laumer <u>Bolo</u> tales fed that fascination - imagine something tank-strong and human-smart. So one of the things I really wanted to put into a wargame was the intelligent tank.

But there is one small problem. Tanks seem to be on their way out.



Present antitank technology (air attacks, laser- and wire-guided missiles, etc...) have made it too cheap and easy to kill those million-dollar tanks. Tanks will still have their uses: probably not as ultra-heavy, multi-gun monsters, but rather as fast, lightly-armored, cheap vehicles, used to exploit breakthroughs rather than create them. Which pretty well lets out the smart tank concept. A cyborg like Gottlos would be incredibly expensive, and could be knocked out by a single tactical nuke; a 200-meter Bolo Mark XXIII would cost even more - and, while it wouldn't fall to one nuke, it would be such a big target that it would go out long before it paid for itself. But I <u>still</u> wanted to do a smart-tank game. So I did. But it had to make some kind of sense...so half of OGRE is built around the need to explain why such units would ever be built. The other half is built around the Microgame concept - but more on that later.

Problem number one, of course, is those little laser-guided missiles. If a supertank is <u>ever</u> going to be practical, it has to be able to stand up to a lot of missile (and that means nuclear) fire. So the first postulate has to be an improvement in armor technology. I rejected a force screen, not because it wouldn't do the job if it existed, but because modern technology doesn't give us even a hint when or if we'll get one. Too much like fantasy. On the other hand, we <u>can</u>, if we wish, assume that materials technology will continue to improve. We already have some incredibly tough two-phase materials. If an armor substance were to be developed such that a couple of feet could stop a tacnuke - and if that substance were light enough so that a vehicle could <u>carry</u> that couple of feet - tanks look better.

Even if the little nukes fired by opposing armor (and infantry) can be weathered, though, there is the possibility of a slightly bigger missile, fired from a couple of hundred kilometers off. We get around this by assuming (again, not too illogically) that jamming technology has improved. We can jam most long-wave signals now. I dno't know how you'd jam a laser (except with smoke or window - unfeasible over large areas), but in a hundred years they may think of something. And satellites, which are such great spotters for missiles, are easy to knock down <u>today</u>. An unarmored satellite is a sitting duck for something as crude as a cloud of gravel fired into its path. A shielded one would be expensive to send up - and a little bitty nuke would ruin its electronic insides with even a not-so-near miss. So spy satellites may still be used - but they will have very short lifetimes and will be correspondingly restricted to times of maximum need.

Another problem, not so much with the tanks as with the whole game, is the <u>big</u> nukes - either missile-delivered or airplane-dropped. If these are still effective, they would make a mockery of conventional warfare, by eliminating all large concentrations of units, and by smashing the objectives that a conventional force might otherwise be needed to take. Again, though, we have a way out. While it's not absolutely certain that laser weapons will become practical, it seems like a good bet. But a laser that can spot and destroy a missile or airplane will be big, delicate, and costly. So they will be used to protect rear areas - but forward units will have to rely on dispersion and jamming.

The net result would be a battlefield where tremendously sophisticated weapons systems would nearly cancel each other out. Target-seeking missile weapons would be countered by various jamming devices, and mass weapons would be too expensive to be used except on the most attractive and vulnerable concentrations.

So, given these assumptions, tank warfare might again become a cost-effective way to run a campaign. Having justified tanks, though, we still have the problem: <u>robot</u> tanks? A number of commentators don't believe we will ever see robot fighting units, of <u>any</u> type. A recent article in S & T (<u>Invasion: America</u> in nr. 57) mentioned the idea in a listing of possible "futuristic" weapons systems, and then dismissed it: "...no robot brain could fight as efficiently as a tank crew: again, people are cheaper..." With all due respect to the author of that generally-good article: hogwash.

■

Less than three minutes had passed. After the initial seconds of panic, the command post had settled down to business. Instead of masterminding an attack, it was fighting for its own life. Men spat orders into throat mikes, eyes on the big screen. The

orange dot that was the Ogre was two kilometers closer, but green sparks were moving out to meet it - the men and machines of the 2033rd.

The general entered at a run. "Get me a picture!" he ordered. The screen flickered; moving dots gave way to an image. The huge machine ground over the landscape, incredibly fast for something so huge. Guns bristled. The tower on top rose seven meters high.

"A Mark V," said the general. They really want us, all right. Who had the watch?"

"I...I did, sir."

"Where'd it come from?"

"Sir...the river. I got a movement indication from the center of the river - I saw it come up. Nothing before that. I swear it, sir."

The general started to reply, then checked himself. Suddenly, he stepped to the keyboard. The map reappeared-the orange dot was closer - and shrank. They saw their island from fifty - a hundred - kilometers in the air.

The general traced the river-course. "Here...and here. Yes. They could have done it."

"Sir?"

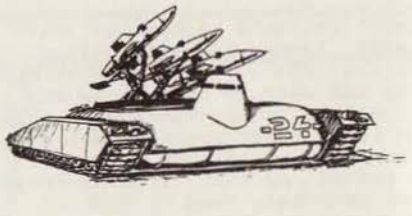
"Underwater. It went into the ocean here. Through the delta - up the river and out. Very clever. I wonder... No, they just outfoxed us. As you were, son."

■

Granted, present computer technology can't replace a man at anything requiring judgment. But that doesn't always have to be true. It is pure mysticism to suggest that the "miraculous" human brain will never be surpassed by electronic circuitry. I won't get into the argument of whether machines can be self-aware, although I think of my Ogres as personalities. I will assert that we will someday be able to build a computer that is faster, "smarter," and more competent, at least in non-creative occupations, than a human brain.

Sure, they'll be expensive. But expense isn't as important as cost-effectiveness. If a million-dollar robot brain can last ten times as long, given the same weapon system, as a man on whom $100,000 was expended for training, the robot side is ahead by the cost of nine sets of weapons blown to scrap with the "cheaper" human operators.

■



The Ogre was six kilometers away. On the big map, a ring of green around it showed missile tanks ready to move in; more green dots, visibly moving, were GEVs harassing the enemy machine. As they watched, one GEV light went out. Another stopped moving and began to blink plaintively. The Ogre moved toward it.

■

The other nice thing about computers is that they can do a lot of things at once. I suspect that part of the reason tanks, unlike battleships, never developed multiple-gun versions is that a group of men under cramped, uncomfortable tank-crew conditions have a great deal of trouble using one gun well. A robot unit, on the other hand, could handle as many weapons as it was given, with perfect coordination.

Which leads to an interesting conclusion. Everything else being equal, a robot tank might be expected to carry as much armor and weaponry as it could. On the one hand, that computer is an expensive investment, and needs to be protected; on the other, the computer can handle more weaponry, so every gun you give it augments its strength effectively.

■

Twelve minutes since the shooting had started. The Ogre was five kilometers away. Faced by eight missile tanks, it had slipped to the side; three of the tanks were gone, and two others had never gotten in range. But the Ogre had paid: it was moving more slowly now. On the big map, three more green dots moved toward it. The heavies were going in.

"Mercier to CP. We've spotted it."

The general punched for an image. There it was. Four of the six missile tubes were empty; two of the "small" guns along one side were scrap. Loose tread flapped; damaged motors sparked. Its guns moved and flashed. Then the screen dimmed as a nuclear warhead hit the Ogre. The image returned. There was a new crater along one of the armored sides - nothing more.

"Get those guns, Commander." The general's voice was calm; Mercier's reply was equally mild. "Trying, sir. It ducks." Then jubilation. "Good shot, Fair! You got it. Hit the misbegotten pile of junk." The big screen was completely dark. It came on again, from a different angle. The Ogre was hurt. One of those big front guns was gone - completely. The other was clearly wrecked.

"Good man, Mercier! Who did that? Commander Fair?...Mercier?...Fair?...

"This is Kowalski in 319. It got Fair about three times. I can't find Mercier."

On the screen, one heavy tank faced the Ogre. Two GEVs swept in and out. Missile tanks and infantry moved closer - too slowly.

"Here it comes." Kowalski - commander of the last heavy. "You'll have to shoot better than that, you gadget. GOTCHA! Took out its..."

Static. Then a new voice. It sounded quite human. And amused.

"Gotcha."

■

Enough. I managed to convince myself that, yes, under certain circumstances, the robotic tank would be a workable weapons system. The next question was: what kind of robot tank?

I rejected the cyborg approach of Gottlos and Cemetery World, not because I doubt it'll work (I think it would), but because (a) it still leaves a human brain at the controls, and I want something better, and (b) I don't like the idea.

Keith Laumer's Bolo stories hit closer to the mark for me, in that he was making the same basic assumption: big, invulnerable, intelligent supertanks. But his Bolos are just too darn big.

Admittedly, we won't know until we try. But fooling around with models and sketches and thinking about the cube-square law, I get the idea that the dinosaurian Bolos would have the same trouble that the dinosaurs did. Unnecessary bulk. Consider: an ordinary main battle tank today is maybe 12 meters long. Double that and you increase the bulk eight times. Not only is that already pretty expensive, but it's already big enough to do the job. Sketch a tank - top view. Now draw a tank body twice as long, twice as wide. See how many tank guns the same size you can give it without crowding...



The practical limit to the size of one of these land cruisers would be that at which it became worthwhile for an enemy to use a strategic nuke on it. Or, alternatively, the size at which you couldn't afford enough of the things to cover all the places you needed to cover. A navy with nothing but battleships would be a poor excuse for a navy, although I wouldn't want to be the first one it got mad at. So I figured on a size of 50 meters or less. That should be amply sufficient to create a monster.

■

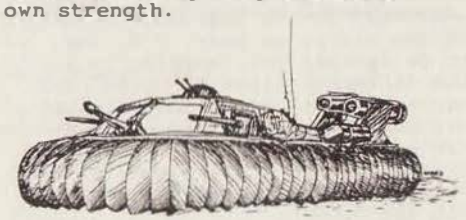
The Ogre rolled on. It was within howitzer range now, and the big missile cannon were scoring on it. It missiles were gone, but it still had guns. The infantry had met it - finally - but, powered armor notwithstanding, they were dying as fast as they came in.

"It's committed," said a big major, his eyes on the screen. "It can't afford to stop now." The general nodded. "Get behind it," he said into his mike. "It's after the howitzers. They're killing it."

In the flame-lit darkness, men heard the scrambled transmission. Men, and one other. The Ogre took in the surrounding terrain, considered the location of the command post and the howitzers, watched the movement of its enemies, weighed the order it had decoded. Behind, it thought. They have made a mistake.

■

All in all, a supertank with a cybernetic brain would be a formidable weapon. Since it would need no crew, its interior could be almost solid. What wasn't power plant or weaponry would be armor. It would be fast, hard to kill, and frightening. In the battle line, it would be a menace; if it could pursue hit-and-run tactics, it could tie up many times its own strength.



It was very close now. Had the command post had windows, the men inside could have seen the explosions. The Ogre was moving very slowly now, but two guns still spoke. It no longer dodged; it was a juggernaut, coming straight for its target.

Inside, the general's face was gray. He spoke to no one in particular. "Smart. That thing is smart." The scream still echoed in the big room - the scream from the last missile tank commander. Out of the Ogre's path, safe behind a three-meter ravine, lashing out at the metal giant - and the thing had changed course, ignoring the howitzers, walking over the gully like it wasn't there, crushing the smaller tank. Two GEVs had died a second later; their speed was their best defense, and the Ogre had outguessed them. The side trip had given the howitzers a few more minutes; then they, too, had died.

The screen showed the Ogre grinding on - a shambling monster, barely able to move. "The treads...shoot at the treads." whispered the general. "Stop that thing." The image changed, and he saw what was left of his force: three GEVs and a handful of infantry.

The Ogre rolled on...

■

Why name it Ogre? It seemed appropriate. Ogres - the "real" ones - were big, violent, and gruesome - and some of them were pretty smart. When someone whispers "Here comes the Ogre," you can feel the hair rising on the back of your neck...

The Ogre, as we worked it out for this game, exists in two varieties - the monstrous Mark V and the slightly less fearsome Mark III. The Mark V carries two big guns, six smaller ones, lots of antipersonnel, and a half-dozen missiles. It is around 40 meters long, and moves (in this game) at 45 kph; it's probably faster on good ground. A Mark III is just as fast, but has less punch. We're working on specs for the Marks I, II, IV, and VI(!). These may show up in TSG, or in a future game.

And, with luck, there will be other Ogre games. This one seems to play well in the MicroGame format; if the micros go over, I'd like to do another one, working in all the different types of Ogres, and maybe yet another, compatable but separate, exploring the powered-armor concept. Of course, OGRE had better work as a MicroGame; it was designed, from the ground up, to fit the format.

The original MicroGame idea was "think small." Something that could be played on a legal-sized map, with a total supply of 50-100 counters, that could be learned in an hour or so and would take about the same time to play. Now, as I said in the beginning, I've been wanting to do a game with "smart tanks." But I hadn't come up with a way to make it anything but a dressed-up Battle of the Bulge. Tanks are tanks. I needed a new wrinkle.

The limitations of the Micro-Game format provided that wrinkle. Thinking about writing a scenario using maybe 30 counters and just a few hexes, it hit me: give one side one counter. One big counter. After that, it started to fall into place.

And it plays - that's the nice thing about it. It actually works. Some people prefer running the defense: "I like to kill Ogres," as one playtester who shall remain nameless remarks. Personally, I like being the Ogre. Either way, though, a player has to make some tough decisions. As the Ogre, you're running in against a superior force that can swamp you with sheer numbers if you're not careful. As the defense, you have to stop a unit that (at least in the beginning) eats your tanks like popcorn, and doesn't have to worry about getting back alive.

That pretty well ends these notes. It doesn't end the OGRE story; I hope that's just starting. It doesn't end the story of the Ogre and the general, either. You'll have to settle that one for yourself. The results aren't in yet...

## The Bored Board

by

Kevin J. Pardus

TRIPLANETARY, since it's first printing back in 1973, has had only one major drawback to it's very realistic s-f game format. This drawback has been mentioned many times in many reviews. Little more than that has been done. The fact still remains that the planets do not orbit Sol. The time has come for some hard thinking and discussion to rectify this problem.

The present game board has on it all the major (plus some minor) bodies out to Jupiter. This list includes Sol, Mercury, Venus, Terra, Mars, Jupiter, plus Luna, the Asteroid Belt and three Jovain satellites. Each of which is in a stationary position around Sol. All of which is represented to the scale of 10 million miles to the hex.

The problem with the present board is that it takes away from the realistic vector movement used by the ships. As a game can last for many months (game time), these stationary positions produce a quite unrealistic situation. In Three months (real time), Venus moves almost halfway through it's orbit around Sol. Terra is a quarter of the way through it's orbit around Sol in that same amount of time. But as it stands now, they just stand still. Precise changes would add more to the realism of the game. The end result would make it a more challenging s-f game than it is now and possibly the best s-f game to be played.

Only three groups of changes would be needed for the more realistic format. The first and simplest group of changes would be to eliminate Luna and the three Jovain moons from the game board. These four moons plus all the other moons would be given counters equal to Oribital Bases, except that they can not be moved from their parent world's hex. Ceres and Eros would no longer be printed on the game board, but would be given counters as Orbital Bases. They would follow their own orbits around Sol.

The second group of changes would be to expand the board size so the planets would be able to have hexagonal shaped orbits around Sol. With each planet's orbit being printed on the game board and having Sol at the center of the playing board. Each planet would now be represented by a counter. All planets and the two major asteroids would be randomly placed along their orbital path at the beginning of the game.

The final group of changes would cover the planetary movement around Sol. Each planet's movement is shown on table #2. The "x" means that the planet moves one hex along its orbital path round Sol, the "0" means that no movement takes place that turn. The planets move at the beginning of each turn before any of the players move. One turn is equal as it is now to one day (game time). All planets and asteroids move counter-clockwise. Ships that have landed or are in orbit around a planet or asteroid base move with that planet or asteroid base.

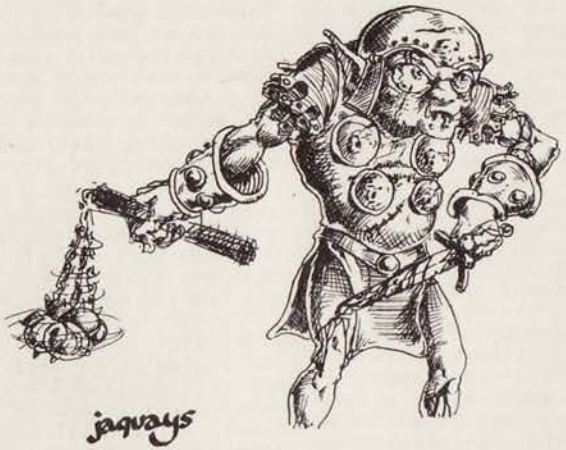
With these changes TRIPLANETARY becomes one of the most realistic s-f game formats to be played. If you want to make these or your own changes to TRIPLANETARY, SPI sells blank sheets and counters or you can make your own.

Table #1

| Planet | | # of hexes from Sol |
|---|---|---|
| Mercury | | 4 |
| Venue | | 8 |
| Terra | | 10 |
| Mars | | 15 |
| The Asteroids | Ceres | 27 |
| | Eros | 29 |
| Jupiter | | 48 |

Table #2

| Planet | Days (Game Time) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Mercury | 0 | 0 | 0 | x | 0 | 0 | 0 | x | 0 | 0 | 0 | x | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Venus | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | x | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | x | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | x |
| Terra | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | x | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | x | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mars | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | x | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The Asteroids | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | x | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Jupiter | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | x |




WEEKEND WARRIOR
by
Patrick Kernaghan

Around the top of Morning Star Dome the maintenance gondola crept, a mechanical snail, gripping its fixed tracks securely with the cog-wheels on its belly. Conso halted his vehicle at the Eastern most point of its circle and turned his back on the ventilators, solar cells, dew collectors and wind generators sprouted above him.

The sun was just cresting the mountains, striking fire from the six domes along the line of the river. This was the best moment of his day. He looked up the river at the other domes--Tudor Rose, Pine Tree, Co-op Youth, Western Pride, East Gate. From this height they looked like anthills; the sleeping denizens of the Morning Star Block beneath him were no more to him than ants.

* * *

Far below, in the living core of the block, an alarm purred softly in the dark. Ignored, it growled, then changed to a high-pitched maniac howl as Johnson stumbled across the floor and silenced it on the second blind swipe.

Without turning on the lights or fully opening his eyes, he crept stealthily to the kitchen, toes alert for contact. He swept aside a small wheeled vehicle, a needle-pointed space cruiser, half a yellow duck. Safely in the kitchen, he pressed the buttons for breakfast, news and weather.

Holding his cup in both hands, crouching over his coffee to warm himself against an imagined chill, he listened without hearing as the machine spoke of negotiations, pre-conditions, fruitful discussions. The weather, for which he had been waiting, was favorable; the old Indian squinted one eye towards the horizon--which would be just over the sink--and nodded sagely.

After breakfast and a sketchy clean-up he fetched his bag out of the hall cupboard. He left the lance tied up in two sections. No point in stabbing somebody in the elevator. The rest he laid out on his blanket in the middle of the floor. It paid to get up and out early, before everybody came trampling through his stuff.

Over his shaven skull went a black, stiff wig with two feathered plaits. Then, working from a tray of colored pencils, he started painting his own insignia, the bear, on his chest. He added stripes across his forehead and biceps in the team colors, red and white, danced around a little to adjust his loin-cloth's armoured cup, and hung his buffalo horn hard hat on the door while he had another cup of coffee. The leggings posed a problem. It could be chilly in the hills at this time of year, and the bushes were murder on his shins. On the other hand, leggings slowed you down. Their fringes were always getting caught, and if you got them wet it was like being tied to the ground. At his age, he couldn't afford to be any slower. Grunting a bit, he laced on his moccasins, standing to test the feel of the foam inserts. When he was a kid he'd done it the hard way, barefoot, with just a feather in his hair and a knife in his teeth. Now he needed all the help he could get.

It was time to go. Adjusting his fur-covered hard hat in the mirror, he bid a silent farewell to Johnson, the hydroponics supervisor, for now he was Black Bear, dog soldier of the Morning Star tribe.

Wrapping his blanket around him, he hefted his lance, still safely in two sections, and let himself out into the hall.

In the elevator he met two other early birds. Murphy, the weekend Samurai, bowed low. "Ohio, Geronimo," he hissed.

Edmunds came crashingly to attention, presenting arms with a Napoleonic musket almost as long as Johnson's lance. "Bonjour, mon sauvage," he said.

Johnson raised his right hand, palm outward. "Ugh," he boomed. Let them share that between them. This little period of morning solitude was valuable to him. He liked to put his thoughts in order and plan out his tactics for the day.

They sank through the living core of the vast truncated cone they called Morning Star; past the hydroponics tanks, the fish ponds, the organic gardens, the compost pits, to the underground transportation center with its web of moving and static strips.

There they parted, grunting civilized nods. The corporal of the Old Guard marched off to the north-bound strip, towards the green-paved quadrant of the spaceport which was reserved every Saturday for the eighteenth century games. Watch out, Wellington.

Johnson and Murphy stepped onto the east strip, joining the motley crowd moving towards the mountains. "Like to get that tin soldier out in the bush," Johnson growled.

"Not much chance," said Murphy. "But you could go to Gameland for the open-class meet. Plenty of everything there."

Johnson felt properly chastened. Murphy had represented his block in the Samurai Games, had led his team in the Cluster Edged Weapons Meet, and had taken the Morning Star Block Ronin to the last Gameland open-class meet, where they had tackled everything up the twentieth century. As the sole survivor, Murphy had to work out now with the Tudor Block Team. Johnson had never competed at a higher level than the regional tribal games, and he knew in his heart that he would never take his lance and tomahawk into twentieth century territory.

Murphy stepped off at his transfer point, and Johnson began to see more and more Indians on the moving strip. There were Tudor Rose Apache from the transfer point, Eastern Gate Iroquois, but no Morning Star Sioux. He was the first of his tribe to reach the heliport, so he fitted his lance together and squatted against a wall out of the wind, holding the lance butt down to show the red and white feathers at the head.

The others came up silently, grunted, and took their place by the wall. Other groups of weekend Indians huddled in clumps around the field, waiting for stragglers. A troop of archers in Lincoln green filed by, led by a man carrying a highly polished hunting horn slung from a leather baldric. One of the Morning Stars indicated the leader with his chin. He clicked his tongue against the roof of this mouth, "Tock". The tribe registered dead-pan amusement.

Then it was time to go."Chief" Sherman, the senior Morning Star, led his sixteen stonefaced, steely-eyed savages to join the others boarding the big yellow helibus marked Anvil Mountain Game Park.

There was one last formality between Anvil Mountain Heliport and the guard towers flanking the gates of the game park. A thin line of picketers from the Anti-Games League straggled back and forth before the gates. A solemn-faced girl with a wreath of plastic flowers in her hair offered pamphlets. The ritual exchange began.

"It's wrong to kill your fellow men."

"It hurts to be killed."

"The games are unnatural."

"They suit my nature."

"There are other ways to prove your manhood."

"Come on inside and we'll try."

"The games violate the univer-

sal peace."

"The games are the only reason that it works."

The girl looked familiar to Johnson. It seemed that she'd been coming to the games for as long as he had, but she was too young for that. Maybe he was thinking of her mother. They all looked alike anyway.

Then, as the tail of the crowd went through the gate, a ritual joke. "Hey, sweetheart, did you murder those flowers?"

The tribe laughed at that one, the adrenalin in their systems driving their laughter out in barks and howls, like a pack of wolves scenting blood. A man could legitimately be killed in the games, in a duel, or at the euthanasia center, because a man is a reasoning being. Plants, on the other hand, could be killed only by licensed technicians and only for food or fibre. The Universal Peace explicitly forbade the destruction of flowers for decorative purposes.

Once through the gates, the Morning Star squatted in a circle, scratching and spitting, while Sherman huddled with the other chiefs around the huge sand table representing the Game Park. Johnson watched a large black bird fly from tree to tree, and rubbed the calf of his left leg. His thumb ran back and forth across an old arrow scar, a twenty-first birthday present.

Sherman came trotting back, two balls of plastic cord in his hands. "Colors of the day," he said. He threw them into the center of the circle. They began cutting the cord into short lengths, twisting green and gold to make headbands.

"What have they got?"

"Red and red."

"Good, doesn't show the mess." A couple of snickers.

"They defend, we attack. They'll be on this side of the ridge, with their home in the rockpile. We'll be co-ordinated by Chief Petersen of the Pine Tree Salish."

"Happy days."

"Wipe out."

"Watch your back."

Sherman ignored the muttering. There was nothing to be done about the leadership. The Pine Tree complex had had a good year, they had fielded the largest team, and the rules put their chief in charge.

"Pine Tree Salish will be in the center, and attack the rockpile; Co-op Youth Blackfoot go to the left, and try to get above the rockpile on the ridge. We swing wide to the right, cross the low end of the ridge, and work up behind them. If we're fast enough, we may get there before the Salish finish them all off."

Sherman waited for the laughs. There weren't very many.

"The medicine men will be at the fork of the creek."

"How big is the safety circle?"

"One hundred yards diameter. White pole markings. Better come in from downstream if you can. I've known the Algonquin to stake out the safety circle and pick off the wounded, and there's plenty of them out there today. Any questions?"

"Yeah. When is that rematch with Custer?" It was the Morning Star joke, as much a part of them as the red and white feathers. Sherman led off toward the hills, and the rest dog-trotted behind him in single file. Passing the leadership to the senior survivor saved a lot of arguments, but it created some problems. One way to solve these problems was to have the chief lead from the front.

About half an hour into the hills, Sherman found the Eastern Gate Iroquois. They were farther down the ridge than he had expected, and had surprised him with an arrow in the throat. They also killed Parker, an older type who worked at the fish farm, and Wilberforce, the transport mechanic. A little man named Sung, who lived three floors down from Johnson, took an arrow in the thigh, and Johnson had to back out of the ambush to cover him as he crawled to shelter. The ambush only involved three young apprentices, but they all came at Johnson, and he had to do some pretty fancy stepping to keep from joining Sherman. Then he caught the lead man in the throat with his broad-bladed lance, and all the feathers were red. The other two circled, trying for a target with their knives, already regretting that they had left their bows. They separated, left and right. Johnson lunged to the left, pivoted right, and sank the lance head between the ribs of the second man. Letting go of the shaft as soon as he felt the shock, he continued his turn, drew his tomahawk and met the other coming in. As the last attacker brought his knife up, Johnson hacked the tomahawk down on his wrist.

Johnson drew a deep breath, and let it out slowly. Lucky for Morning Star to be ambushed by three young keeners. Even one older man might have kept them back in the bush, and then too bad for Johnson. He looked down at the wounded survivor. Kneeling in the dust, he supported in his cupped left hand a right hand



connected only by a few ligaments. That one had learned his lesson young. Next time he'd sit back until he ran out of arrows or targets, whichever came first.

Swiftly Johnson went to work; forming a tourniquet from a dead man's belt, he sliced the hand off neatly and packed it in the young man's belt pouch, pushed the arrow through Sung's leg, cut off the head, and withdrew the shaft. Only then did he unhook his bear-fang necklace, unscrew one of the teeth, and inject each of them with painkiller. They were too well-trained to moan, but Sung did let out a long sigh when the arrow came out.

Looking around for leadership, he discovered that he was the senior survivor, and calling up the Wilson kid, assigned him to take the two casualties to the medicine man.

"And stay around", he ordered. "There may be more, and I want you to get the wounded to the helibus."

He turned to the one-handed man. "Okay, Lefty. Get to the medicine man now before the hand cools and you'll be playing the banjo tomorrow."

The wounded man swayed, eyes glassy with shock. Johnson took a spare bowstring from one of the dead and attached his left arm to Sung's right arm. Then, with Wilson supporting Sung, and Sung towing the stranger, they moved off to the safety circle.

Johnson sent out a runner to Petersen to report the situation, and looked around. Ten little Indians--eleven with himself--and the day had hardly begun.

"From here on in," he told them, "we go slowly and carefully."

* * *

Conso stirred in his hammock, feeling his sweaty shirt stick to his back, and extended a languid arm to the network of cords strung above his head. He pulled one to open a vent, another to provide him with a pressure-tube of beer from the cold-pack.

This was the life. Not like the howling hell they lived through every winter, with everything frozen open or frozen shut, ice buildups to crack the dome, snowdrifts that turned into slides and took you over the edge with them...they had lost two of their crew the previous winter. There was no Universal Peace with the weather.

* * *

Johnson grounded the butt of his lance and leaned on it. The sun was lower in the sky, but not half low enough. He dragged in great gulps of air and ran his tongue over teeth gritty with sand. His no-run paint was running in little puddles of sweat, and the cut on his head refused to stop dripping blood past his right ear. He was so tired that his legs vibrated like violin strings. He had six men left, and not the best six, either.

Petersen's incompetence had led to the expected result, but Petersen was dead, so there was no one to complain to. From where he stood he could see the rockpile, and the scattered, feathered heaps that marked the route of Petersen's initial assault. Johnson spat thickly. Idiots like Petersen should be confined to the eighteenth century. Napoleonic was too flexible for them, never mind Indian.

No use crying over it. He sent one of his six stumbling right to establish contact with the Salish, one staggering left to see if there were any Blackfoot left. They had to pull the tribes together before the other side came out of the rocks, or they'd be slaughtered like rabbits.

* * *

Conso padded out to the observation deck and leaned over the rail. To the north, he could see the spaceport. Blocks of red, blue, green and white moved across it. He heard a bugle call, faint but clear. Then a volley of musketry, and another, like cloth tearing. Clouds of smoke blotted out the colors. "Must be Saturday," he said to himself.

* * *

The little brook was only shin-deep, but it ran all year. Its singing coolness was too much for Shulman, and he went down on his knees and stuck his head in the water. Johnson kicked him in his plainly visible ribs.

"Get out of it! If you founder yourself we'll leave you."

Shulman staggered to his feet, dripping and trembling. Johnson and Arkwright scooped water in their hands, rinsed their mouths, spat it out. The three of them padded off down the creekside in an exhausted dogtrot. Now they were being hunted, and Johnson was in the rear.

* * *

After supper, Conso and Hamilton sat out on the deck and watched the birds come back. They swept up in great flocks, returning from the bare hills and scrubby fields where they pecked out their living. Each flock made several passes before

they seemed to feel secure enough to come to their nesting grounds.

"Saw that greedy hawk today," said Hamilton. "He's hanging around the main solar collector."

There was no Universal Peace amoung the birds.

* * *

Sundown.

Johnson and Shulman sat in the Ranger Shelter dictating their reports. Long tapes on who was killed, where, when, how, who by. Johnson filled out a form for the recovery of one helmet, horned, simulated buffalo hide, his name and social number engraved on lining, lost in vicinity of the rockpile.

"Very good,sir. The cleanup crew will have it for you when you come in next week. Just pay the girl when you pick it up," said the attendant.

The wounded had gone ahead. Eight, thank God, with Johnson and Shulman ten, and Wilson made eleven. Six short. The Pine Tree Salish should be so lucky. The followed that idiot Petersen right up to the rockpile, and not many came back.

As Johnson and Shulman left the helibus, the amplified beat called them over to Big Circle, where the Tribal Cluster had laid on the firewater. They filled the Morning Star cup, but with only two of them to pass it back and forth, they didn't refill it. While they had their noses in the battered old loving cup, the loudspeaker kept up a drumbeat of announcements.

"Memorial dance for the fallen Salish. Water games fans--don't miss the pinnace match--Long John Silver and Captain Morgan at the Big River. After a hard game do you have trouble getting back to work? Owl's Cry Herbal Preparation calms nerves, increases energy, sweetens breath, improves digestion..."

Shulman started to rehash the game with a couple of survivors from Co-op Youth, so Johnson went home alone. Luckily he ran into Murphy on the moving strip, and they rode along in companionable silence. He wondered if he could persuade Murphy-san to pack in Oriental and go Indian. After all, a man's first loyalty should be to his block, not his game, and a man like Murphy was too valuable to be lost to Morning Star. Tomorrow he'd bring it up, casually.

Lost in such thoughts, he didn't notice the pedicap until Murphy drew his attention to it. Two men in white coveralls were unloading a broken toy soldier in the uniform of Napoleon's Guard. It looked as though Edmunds had caught some grape shot, or musket balls, or cannon ball, or something.

"We'll take him," Murphy said.

The man holding the foot of the stretcher appeared to be in charge. "We're supposed to take him right home, and get a receipt."

"He's home now," said Johnson. "What the hell, in Morning Star we're all brothers."

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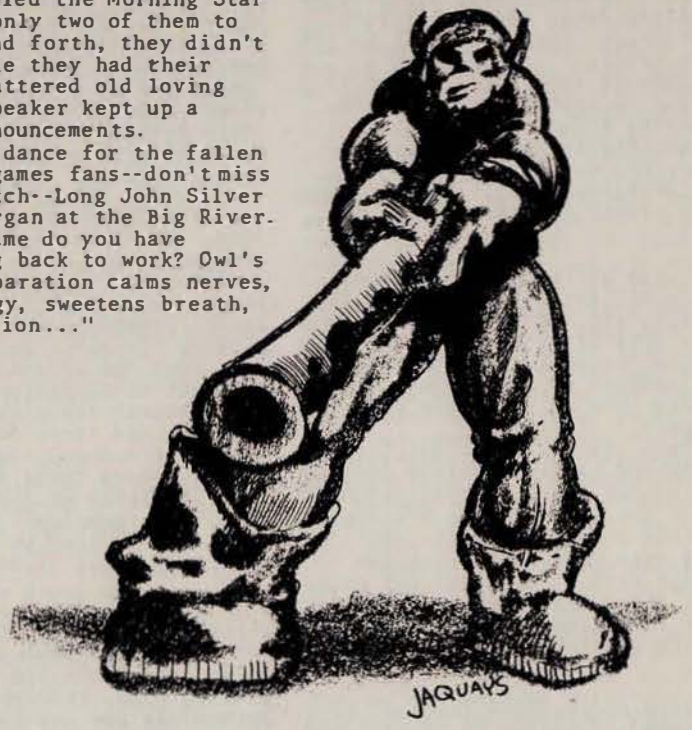




# BOOKS

## ALTERNATE WORLDS

by

Ben Ostrander

"...life's all a mass of significance, all sorts of strands and threads woven like a tapestry or a brocade. So if you pulled one out or broke it the pattern would alter right back through the cloth...it would make just as much sense backwards as forwards, effects leading to causes and those to more effects." Pavane

The Oxford English Dictionary defines extrapolation as "the action or method of finding by a calculation based on the known terms of a series other terms outside of them, whether proceeding or following." Extrapolation is the corner stone of science fiction, the means by which facts are altered, changes are recognized, and stories are produced. Extrapolation is present in scientific stories (what if a new form of energy were discovered? a new type of physics or math?) or life science stories (what is this sentinet, water-breathing race like? what of their minds? Gods?) or demonstration polemics (what's it like to be watched at all times? or if ad agencies ruled the world? or cloning was the only means of producing a new generation?) In fact, extrapolation can be applied to any field of study that has a base of data from which to draw.

However in one field, history, extrapolation reaches a pinnacle. By changing a single fact or incident, by letting a pivotal figure live longer or die earlier,an author can show us our present in a funhouse mirror of crazy-quilt logic. Alternate worlds are pure examples of what speculative fiction can achieve. With a carefully extrapolated example of what-might-have-been in hand, we can view the present in terms free of bias and prejudice that so much accompany our current opinions. Free of what is, we can gain perspectives and insights valuable to our everyday lives and decisions.

The difficulties in writing such a novel are testified to in the small number of volumes available. An alternate world, in it's purest form, demonstrates our current time period against a single event in reversal. No time machines, no time travellers, but a world that could have been but wasn't, told straight as it would have happened.

The Man in the High Castle by Philip Dick is the most well known example of this type. In this extremely well written novel, Dick postulates a present in which Roosevelt is assassinated in Miami. His heavy influence is lost and when Japan and Germany rise, the United States is in a weak position. We lose WWII and Japan becomes the occupator instead of the occupated. Dick won a Hugo with The Man in the High Castle. It is an excellent novel and an even better yardstick for judging other novels of this type. Ada by Vladimir Nabokov tells us of an America in which Russia explores and settles North America from the west. With typical Nabokovian trickery, anti-terra, as he calls this new world, views time differently. The hero of the story, Van Veen, has frightful visions of a world like ours. In it he is poor and insignificant, a nobody. Nightmares of our current reality haunt him constantly. Ada is, at best, a difficult novel. Nabokov is a stylist who is better know for Lolita, but he is an obvious admirer of Wells and Verne whom he read as a boy. Tunnel Through the Deeps by Harry Harrison gives us a world in which the battle of Navas de Tolosa was lost by the Christians. Spain and Portugal never come into being. John Cabot discovers North and South America. The United States becomes nothing more than a large dominion of England.

To my mind the best alternate world novels are Pavane by Keith Roberts and The Alteration by Kingsley Amis. In Pavane, Elizabeth is assassinated. England, weak and unsure, can't turn back tne Spanish Armada in 1588. Spain, under heavy influence from the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church, invades. England falls and Papal law rules for the next 500 years. A different England of 1968 is where the novel

begins. Trains and trucks have undergone a strange metamorphosis. Combined, they carry goods about the country, but horseback is still the chief means of travel. Communications are carried out through an elaborate system of semaphore towers that occupy the high areas of England and Europe. Lady Elanor is the central character of the book. Her keep, seriously burdened by a bad growing season, has it's tax rate increased by Rome. With a calculated care for her subjects, she defies the Pope and refuses to pay. War, in which she is victorious,fulfills the destiny of Elizabeth. Rome is numbed by the loss and revolution becomes the normal means of freedom. History begins a slow return to our way of viewing it. The strength of Pavane lies in it's rich characterization and detail filled background. The realism of it's logic seems indisputable.

In the same vein is Kingsley-Amis' The Alteration. This recent novel by a long time lover of speculative fiction portrays a world in which there is no Reformation. Martin Luther compromises, accepts the post of Pope and becomes Germanian the First. Again the Catholic church is in full power. Hubert Anvil, the main character, is a boy soprano of unbelievable skill and talent. The Holy Office of Rome deems his ability so great that his voice should be preserved for all to hear. He is to become a castrato. When faced with the choice, Hubert defies Rome and tries to escape his fate. Amis' storytelling gift is incredible. The reader becomes completely swept away in the adventures of the young runaway. This is an excellent book by any standards!

The significance of such novels should not be lost to gamers. Every tactical game session is in itself an "alternate world". War games, especially those based on actual conflicts, allow outcomes to change. Results of such reversals aren't known, but it must be assumed things would have changed. In future society level games each decision can alter the end result of play. When political aspects are added, as in GODSFIRE, the possibilities for alternate results increase many times.

Remember, next time you read a book about how it could have been, you are really reading a complex example of a game. It is a narrow view, a "one line" idea, but it is in essence a game. One that wasn't played in reality, but somewhere within the texture of time, it does exist.

THE DRAGON AND THE GEORGE
by
Steve Jackson

If Gordon Dickson doesn't play (DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS), he should. He'd enjoy it. And if you haven't read THE DRAGON AND THE GEORGE, you should. Especially if you're a D & D fan.

THE DRAGON AND THE GEORGE is pure, unadulterated, 200 proof escapism - consistent, convincing, and well crafted. It chronicles the adventures of James Eckert, a graduate student with two hobbies - volleyball and a lady named Angie - and one problem - survival on a teaching assistant's "salary". Until the day Angie's crackpot boss makes her disappear before his eyes. When Jim demands to be sent after her, things get interesting.

For Angie went to a world where magic works, wolves talk, and dragons abound. And Jim somehow left his body behind in the transfer, and wound up as a dragon himself. Which comes in handy when the Powers of Evil make off with Angie...

I'm not giving anything away. It's barely started. Still to come is plenty of sorcery, intrigue, beautiful maidens, an archer to put Robin Hood to shame, and some scholarly discourse on draconian aerodynamics, all set against a beautifully detailed and, as far as I can tell, accurate medieval background on a world that is not quite Earth - but has an England.

The final battle could have come straight from a DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS campaign - which led to my opening comment. It reads well, and looks as though it would have played well. There are tragedies, but right triumphs in the end, which is as it should be.

THE DRAGON AND THE GEORGE is published by Doubleday. There's a book club edition out. One way or another, read it.



## ....FEEDBACK....&....GAME RATINGS

Feedback and other response for TSG #8 was the heaviest it's been for the last several issues. More than 150 readers sent in feedback sheets or made other comments. The big suprise was the high rating for TSG #8 art. That tells us to keep improving TSG graphics and format along current lines.

| RATING | ARTICLE/ITEM |
|---|---|
| 6.8 | TSG #8 Art |
| 6.5 | Starship Troopers: Review |
| 6.4 | Triplanetary:Suggestions |
| 6.4 | Present at the Birth... |
| 6.1 | Starship: Review |
| 5.9 | Godsfire Teasers |
| 5.7 | Sorcerer: Review |
| 5.4 | Ythri: Innovations |
| 5.2 | Simonsens Trinity |
| *6.1 | TSG #8 Overall |

Our apologies to Robert Taylor for forgetting to feedback his article on the Soviet space program. Many asked about it and all comment was favorable.

The feedback on the computer game pricing was welcome. The three higher priced items were rated virtually identical. The $1 a turn option rated a 5.7, $1.25 rated 5.8, $1.50 rated 6.7, $2 rated 6.6, and $3 rated 6.6. Of course, it's likely that those most interested in the computer PBM games were those who voted. The key factor seemed to be the $1.50 a turn game being more complicated than Stellar Conquest. This probably means that METASTAR SYSTEM 80 will be about the right scale as planned. It will be the next magnitude up from SC and it should be possible for that $1.50 per turn.

The magazine ratings were instructive. The high TSG rating should probably be deflated by .5 to 1.0 worth to reflect the bias of a readership that already likes TSG in a general way. When the number of responses for each magazine are related to their relative rating there is almost a perfect correlation.

| RATING | MAGAZINE |
|---|---|
| 7.8 | Strategy & Tactics |
| 7.3 | The Space Gamer |
| 7.0 | Moves |
| 6.8 | Jagdpanther |
| 6.6 | Dragon |
| 6.6 | The General |
| 6.3 | Panzerfaust/Campaign |
| 5.9 | Wargamers Digest |

The following publications had too few ratings to be fully accurate. Alien Critic 6.7, Creative Computing 6.3, Algol 6.0, Little Wars 5.7, and Locus 5.0.

The rank ordering of the computer gaming proposals showed several things. Readers aren't interested in cash tournements and prizes. That's a bit of a suprise for us. Given gamer egos, the same as every one else, it is hard to believe there is no drive for a tad of glory.

What readers liked best about computer gaming possibilities are greater game complexities, greater challenge to skill/ knowledge, and player rankings. You see the paradox? Player rankings are popular but tournements aren't.

One series of comments was on rank order rankings. Many found it hard to shift from the TSG article ratings method to the rank order method. We won't do it again.

# NEWS & PLUGS

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IMPORTANT NOTICE TO TSG READERS

Please read this, your life may depend on it!

We must have any address changes as soon as you know it. TSG is sent to subscribers via bulk rate. The Post Office will not forward any bulk rate mail. (Don't blame us, write your Congressperson!) We want you to get every issue, but we need your help. Send in those address changes!

Metagaming Concepts does not accept foreign subs and orders (exclude Canada) for several reasons. We are a small company and can't handle the extra load. If you know someone overseas, have them contact THE GAMES CENTRE, 16 Hanway Street, London W1A 2LS, England, they are our European rep. They are the ones to see for our entire line.

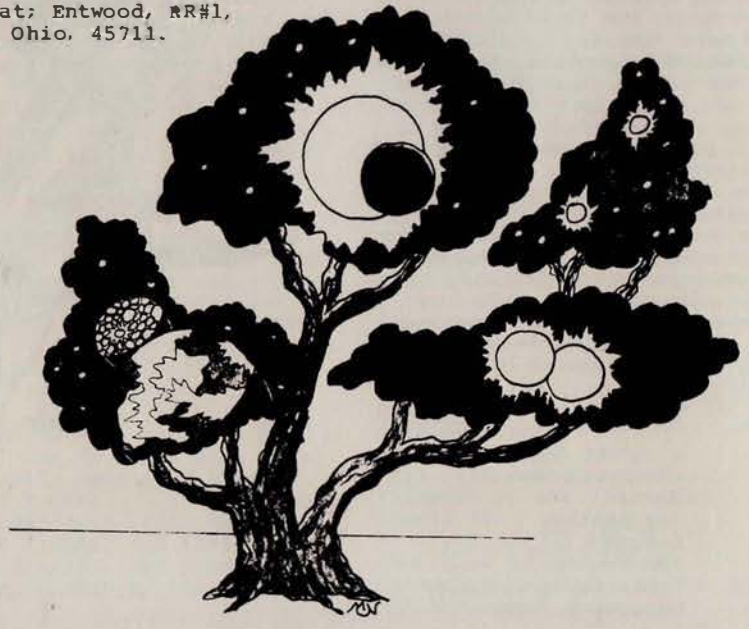
⇧ ⇧ ⇧ ⇧ ⇧ ⇧ ⇧ ⇧ ⇧ ⇧ ⇧

As of 1/12/76 STAR EMPIRES from TSR is still not out. Metagaming will ship all first class on SE for all who ordered from us as soon as we have a stock.

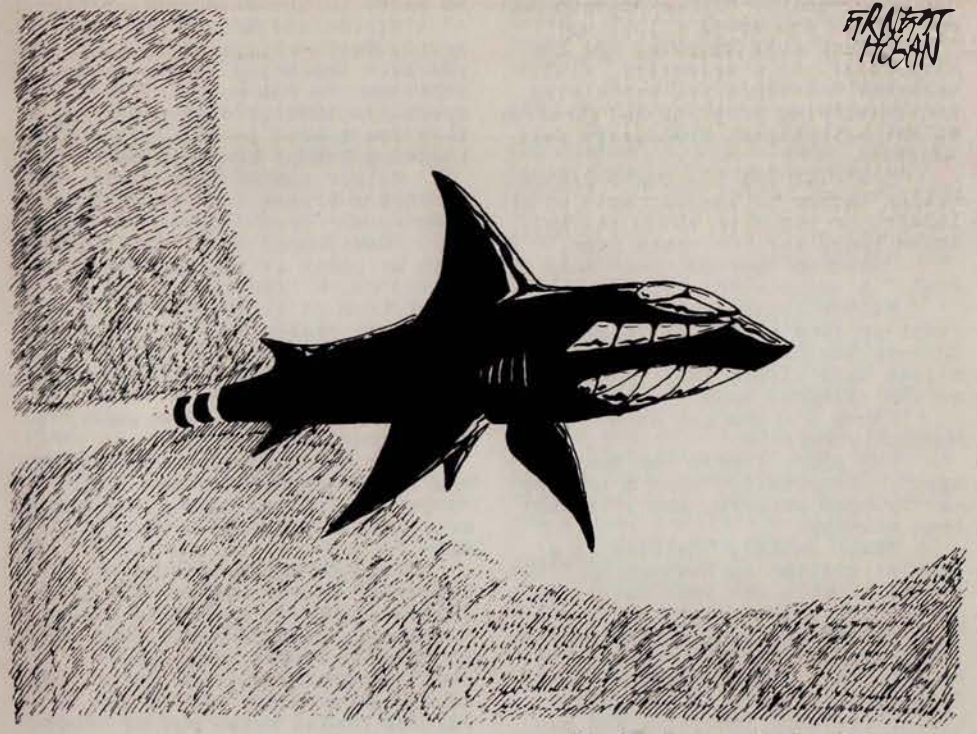
JagdPanther magazine has changed it's name to Battlefield. It is available from Steve Cole, P.O. Box 3565, Amarillo, TX 79106.

Northwestern University's Chess 4.5 program was declared this year's U.S. Computer Chess champion after sweeping a field of 10 contenders. Chess 4.5, run on a CDC Cyber 170 has won the title six times in the seven years it has been played. It set a record for the number of positions evaluated for a single move--2,048,088.

QUENDI KHAZAD DUM is a fanzine published by William A. Clumm. He is also running a myriad of play-by-mail games. To find out more write him at; Entwood, RR#1, Amesville, Ohio, 45711.








IAGO'S VOW
by
Robert Taylor

Paul Miller watched the men as they entered the room. Each was obviously tired like himself. It had been a rough weekend.

The men deposited their folders and briefcases on the table then gathered around a small tray that held a coffee pot. Slowly they found seats around the massive table where Miller sat.

As the men began sitting down, Miller noticed they had a sameness to them. Only the uniformed man stood out, but like the others he was middle-aged and graying. Yet each man had an intensity about him. Their eyes were alert and intelligent. Despite their fatigue, the men carried themselves and the powers they held very well.

Miller recognized all the men, and wondered idly if any of them knew who he was. Shrugging off that thought, Miller noticed the men had broken into three groups each engaged in its own conversation.

The two Cabinet members, the Secretaries of State and Defense, were quietly debating some point, but Miller couldn't hear them.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA director, and the National Security Advisor seemed to share the same mood. Each was downcast, and they spoke in heavy tones.

"He should have never let the public know," the CIA director said.

"Maybe," the NSA replied, "but it certainly would have been impossible to keep the lid on anything after Australia."

"Do you think he will declare martial law?" the Chairman of the JCS asked.

The NSA shook his head. "Who knows? Kennedy didn't during the Cuban crisis, and we haven't reached that point yet."

Miller turned toward the third group. The two leaders of Congress were listening to the Administrator of NASA.

"No, the shuttle won't go out to 22,000 miles," he said.

"Why not," the Speaker of the House asked.

"It doesn't have enough fuel," the NASA chief replied.

"Can't you fix it up to carry more fuel?" the Majority Leader of the Senate inquired.

The NASA chief smiled tolerantly. "We are working on something like that Senator, but we've only had three weeks to almost redesign an entire spacecraft."

The Speaker of the House frowned. "Can't you speed things up?"

Miller felt sympathy for the NASA chief. As a scientist, Miller knew the difficulty of explaining and justifying programs and theories to non-scientists, especially politicians.

Shutting out the conversation, Miller turned to the contents of his folder. He began to thumb the half dozen pages for the tenth time.

"Glad to see you could make it, Paul," a voice said mildly.

Miller looked up and saw the familiar face of the White House Science Advisor. "Dr. Smith," Miller said with a smile, and grasped the extended hand.

"When did you get here?" Smith asked sitting down.

"My plane landed two hours ago," Miller said, "then a helicopter brought me here, and I've just been waiting."

Smith smiled, "Waiting is a popular pastime in Washington." He paused. "Let's get some coffee before the President arrives."

Miller nodded and they went to the tray. While Miller poured for both of them, Smith began discussing his quick trip to Australia. Miller listened intently, and was forming a question when he noticed the President enter the room. He was of medium height and build and seemed to carry the weight of his office well. A woman passed middle-age accompanied him. She was scribbling notes as he spoke. Abruptly the President stopped, glanced around the room and gave her a courteous nod. She left closing the door behind her.

All the men seated at the table were now standing. "Good morning, Mr. President," the Chairman of the JCS said briskly.

"Be seated, gentlemen," the President said tonelessly. He walked to they tray, picked up a cup, and extended it toward Miller.

Miller poured, concentrating on not spilling, but he saw the President regarding him with a curious look. Smith spoke up quickly. "Mr. President, this is Dr. Paul Miller, the exobiologist from California. He heads the Rand think tank on the aliens."

"Yes. Miller...Jim told me about you Sunday before I sent him to Australia. I hope you can offer us some insights into the aliens' behavior." The President's voice was still toneless.

"I'll try, Mr. President." Miller replied evenly.

"Well, let's get started," the President said in a quick breath as he moved to the head of the table.

Miller and Smith took their seats. Smith whispered to him, "If you have something to say, make it short and to the point. They respect a scientist's opinion, but they don't want to hear all the thinking behind the opinion."

Miller nodded silently as he watched everyone turn their attention to the President.

"Gentlemen, Dr. Paul Miller is with us today at the request of Dr. Smith. Dr. Miller is head of a think tank on the aliens." The President looked directly at him. "Dr. Miller, feel free to speak up at any time. These sessions are quite informal."

"Thank you, Mr. President," Miller said dryly.

The President folded his hands and leaned forward on the table. "A great deal has happened since we met on Friday. Rick, bring us up to date."

The NSA spoke in a quiet, matter-of-factly voice. "Yes sir. Friday afternoon the three alien spacecraft were in orbit over the southern United States, where they've been since they first showed up. Late Friday one of the smaller crafts broke out of orbit and went into lunar orbit." The NSA looked to his right. "Bill, I understand you have some information on what that craft did."

The NASA chief nodded. "This smaller craft launched another ship that landed on the moon. It landed in the Taurus-Littrow region, right on top of the Apollo 17 landing site. So close, in fact, that the seismograph left by our astronauts picked up the aliens' activities."

"Any idea what they did up there?" the President asked.

"Not exactly, sir," answered the NASA chief, "but we feel for certain they gave most our equipment a good going over."

"They know our space technology represents our best hardware. They wanted to learn about our capabilities," Smith injected.

"I agree," the NASA chief nodded. "And that could be a plus for us since that equipment is over fifteen years old. They may underestimate us."

The President smiled then nodded for the NSA to continue.

"The landing craft rejoined the mother ship, and it returned to earth orbit. Late Saturday the three ships moved over Australia. Approximately noon, Australian time, the ships began firing on the three largest cities of Australia." The NSA's voice tightened. "By two o'clock, Australian time, the cities were destroyed and close to three million people were dead." He paused, and then added a final statement. "The ships are now over the south Atlantic, they still broadcast the same message every hour, and they still ignore our communication attempts."

"Thank you, Rick," the President said slowly. He turned toward Smith. "Jim, how were those cities destroyed."

"In simple terms, Mr. President," Smith said heavily, "the weapon was a beam of high energy."

"A laser?" the Speaker of the House asked.

Smith frowned. "Technically speaking, no, but laser comes as close as anything. This beam was nearly two miles in diameter, and the heat generated from it was over a thousand degrees. Each ship swept its beam over the city it was attacking like you would use a water hose on your front lawn. The destruction in Sydney was enormous, and Melbourne and Brisbane literally don't exist anymore."

Miller was quickly jotting down notes. He noticed the President was also scribbling on his pad. He wondered if their notes were the same. No, he thought, the President probably sees all of this in a broader perspective than any of us.

The President ceased his writing, and looked up at the Chairman of the JCS. "General Wynn, do we have any defense against the aliens' weapons?" the President asked sharply.

"No, sir," the General replied promptly.

"Can we take any effective military action against them?" the President asked with little optimism in his voice.

The General shook his head. "I doubt it, Mr. President. Their ships are over 22,000 miles out in space in a synchronous orbit. Any missle we fired at them would take over an hour to reach them. In that amount of time, they could move or with their laser weapon they could easily shoot down our missles."

"Even a thousands missles?" the Majority Leader asked hopefully.

I'm afraid so, Senator," the General responded. "We worked up a computer model on that possibility, but with the obviously advanced state of their weapons they would have no trouble stopping a thousand or two thousand missles."

Miller heard someone in the room sigh heavily.

"Mr. President," it was the Secretary of Defense. "While our own military capabilities are quite limited, I would like to point out that the aliens, too, have limits."

"Tell that to the Australians," the Secretary of State muttered.

The Defense Secretary ignored the comment and continued. "Now if these creatures are planning an invasion of the Earth, as ludicrous as that statement sounds, I feel they've come a little shorthanded."

"Get to the point, Mark," the President said softly.

"Yes, sir." He produced a sheet of paper from his briefcase. "This information we received today. Ever since they first appeared we've been unable to get a decent radar image of their ships. Of course, that's why we noticed them to begin with. They have some sort of field around their ships that distort radar and light waves. We couldn't get a good photograph either."

Everyone was bent forward attentively.

"But when they fired on the Australian cities," the Defense Secretary's voice was excited, "this field ceased, and we were able to get good radar images and photos."

"Curious," Smith said quietly.

"Now the radar images told us the big ship was nearly a thousand feet long and the two smaller ships were about three-hundred feet each. And the photos confirmed this."

"What did the ships look like?" the CIA director asked.

"The photos don't show detail," he conceded, "but none of the ships is aerodynamicly sound."

The Speaker of the House looked puzzled.

"They can't enter the atmosphere," the Defense Secretary explained, then went back to his discussion. "Now we were able to estimate the cubic feet inside those ships, and if we believe these creatures are similar to us in height and build, then there can't be more than 300,000 troops on those ships, probably less."

Miller nodded in understanding, but felt a nagging doubt.

The Defense Secretary drew a deep breath, and finished. "From a military stand point, I don't see how they could conquer an entire planet with 300,000 troops. And I don't care if they have a Buck Rogers death ray gun, all we have to do is wait till they land then we can attrition the hell out of them."

There was a moment of silence then the NSA spoke. "Interesting. The situation is very similar to our engagement in Viet Nam. We controlled the air, but the Viet Cong held

the ground, and forced us to fight their type of warfare."

"Exactly," the Defense Secretary said.

Miller looked at the President. He was frowning. Miller couldn't tell if it was an expression of concentration or skepticism.

"Mark, are you suggesting we abandon our cities, and wage a guerrilla war against the aliens?" the President asked evenly.

"Essentially yes, Mr. President," the SOD answered reluctantly. "I feel we have no other choice."

The President nodded silently and wrote on his pad.

"Mr. President, I disagree," the CIA director said coldly. "I don't doubt that the Secretary's figures are correct, but I'm an old navy man, and the way these ships maneuver reminds me of a battleship with a cruiser escort. The purpose of these ships may be to soften us up before a larger fleet arrives. And anyway, why should they bother landing. Their apparent ability to fry any spot on the globe seems to dictate the current strategy. They're in control. We can't make them land."

Thank you, Ben," the President said and again he wrote on the pad.

Miller studied the President closely, but he couldn't tell how he was weighing the discussion. "Gentlemen, let's put the military problem aside for a moment, and concentrate on our diplomatic options, Steve."

The Secretary of State looked at the President, then glanced quickly at the rest of the men at the table.

"With the aliens, we have no options since they do not respond to our communication attempts." The Secretary spoke in a slow, hesitant manner. "They simply repeat the same message they've sent since they first appeared." His voice suddenly filled with firmness. "But the message does give us an advantage in dealing with other countries. Not in anything it says, but the fact that it was in English and transmitted over the frequency used by our astronauts makes the United States appear to be something special to the aliens."

"Meaning other nations are waiting to see what we do," the President said.

"Yes, Mr. President," the Secretary replied. "Also, the course of action we choose will be followed by all the major powers, and with the Australian destruction action becomes imperative."

"Will the Russians and Chinese go along with us?" the Speaker of the House asked incredulously.

"Yes, Mr. Speaker," the Secretary answered calmly. "It is in their interest to do so." The Secretary swept his hands apart in a broad gesture. "This situation is unique, but it is a global problem, like nuclear war. Nuclear war threatens everyone. They avoid nuclear war because it is in their interest to do so. We will face the aliens with a common front because it is in everyone's interest to do so. Each nation will have its own selfish reasons for doing so, but the overriding cause will be that we all inhabit the same planet. That's a trite phrase, but it applies."

"What if the aliens were to offer us help in confronting the Russians and the Chinese?" the Defense Secretary asked bluntly.

"I would strongly recommend we decline such an offer," the Secretary's tone was grim. "I see no advantage to beating our human adversaries with a non-human ally. I can assure you the Soviets and the Chinese feel the same way. I don't doubt that with the aliens' aid America could rule the world, but to what end? We would rule the world, but the aliens would rule us."

The Secretary looked directly at the President. "Excuse my lecturing, Mr. President, but as I said; with the aliens we have no options; with the rest of the world they will respond favorably with our initiative."

"I confirm what the Secretary said, Mr. President," the CIA director added. "Our intelligence reports the Soviet leaders will not take unilateral action. They're waiting for us to take the first step."

The President sighed deeply. He massaged the bridge of his nose. His voice had a weariness to it. "Dr. Miller, any conclusions, any analysis?"

Miller's throat felt dry. He licked his lips and began speaking slowly but firmly. "Mr. Presiendt, in attempting to analyze the aliens, we only have these two things-the aliens' actions and the message they keep repeating." Miller glanced at the terse statement before him. It read: relinquish control of your planet to us. Miller looked around the table. "The message is an ultimatum. It only lacks the 'or else' to make it complete. We did not relinquish control, and they acted to prod us along with the destruction of the Australian cities."



"Why Australia?" the NSA asked abruptly.

"Australia is a large, empty continent, few people, and little industrialization. The aliens probably felt the world could afford to lose the Australian cities," Miller replied in a level tone, "and after all, the rest of the world got an excellent lesson."

"They fired a shot across our bow," the CIA director said flatly.

Miller nodded. "Yes, and the positioning of their ships over the Atlantic indicates they won't attack any cities for awhile. They're waiting for a reply, and if they don't get one soon they'll probably destroy some more cities. Can you imagine the panic if those ships were to move over Europe or the east coast of the United States."

"And the aliens will only accept one reply," the President said with a tone of finality.

Miller nodded with relief. Everyone was thinking the same thought. A heavy silence filled the room. Miller waited for someone to put the thought into words, to lay it naked before the group.

Miller glanced at the President, and noticed that everyone was looking at him also. Truman was right, thought Miller, the buck stops here.

The President was staring at his note pad, searching it for an answer. When he looked up at the men around the table, his eyes had a profound sadness to them.

"Gentlemen, it appears all options are exhausted," the President said heavily. "There are other factors to consider besides military and diplomatic. The economy froze when the aliens appeared three weeks ago. Now, with the attack on the Australian cities, my economic advisors conclude this nation will collapse financially in one short month. As you know, the stock market did not open today. Many banks have been forced to close. The people need the guarantee of a future even if it is one dominated by aliens. I, therefore, feel we must acquiesce to the aliens and surrender."

The awkward silence lasted half a minute before someone spoke. "Mr. President," it was the Speaker of the House, "I believe everyone here supports that decision as the only choice left to us under these conditions. As a member of your loyal opposition, I assure you of my party's full support."

"Thank you, John." The President turned to the Senator. "Do you think the American people will understand?"

"Yes, Mr. President, they will. Dying is only worthwhile when one dies for something. To fight would perhaps be noble, but it is certain suicide."

"Mark," the President said to the Defense Secretary, "keep those plans for a guerrilla war ready. We will need them someday."

With the decision made, Miller noticed the room had relaxed. The pressure was gone, and idle conversation filled the vacuum.

Smith had turned to him, and was speaking in a light tone. "It's not a very noble or dignified decision, but it is the correct one. We must give in now, and hope that in the future we will be able to avenge ourselves."

"Following so that we can serve our turn upon them," Miller said softly.

A quiet smile crossed Smith's face. "It appears you're becoming rather philosophical, Paul, quoting Shakespeare. Othello, I believe."

"Yes," Miller said. "Iago's vow of revenge." He paused, then shrugged. "But I don't feel philosophical, only cold and scared. Very, very scared."

* * *

The alien took in the planet below. He enjoyed the richness of the colors, and marvelled at the beauty of the swirling sphere.

An aide approched, bowed, and extended a thin sheet of plastic. The alien gave a short nod, and the aide bowed again and left.

The alien looked at the sheet of plastic. It glowed as lettering appeared on the surface. The alien read and finished with a grunt.

So the little creatures have surrendered. A wise choice! With their backward science and equipment they could not have fought with any hope of success. His vision turned to the planet once again.

Perhaps I will be rewarded with the senior ship of the planet, he thought. I have delivered a living planet. They should be most generous.

His mouth produced the equivalent of a smile, but a thought nagging in the back of his head began to push itself forward till it occupied his mind. The smile faded.

Something one of his lieutenant had said after returning from the planet's moon. The lieutenant had spoken of the crudeness of their spacecraft. How brave the creatures must be to trust their lives to such equipment. Yet their surrender

showed them to be cowards, willing to sacrifice everything to live. Such creatures could have no honor. But, could they be both cowardly and brave? It was a contradiction, and contradictions were unpredictable and too often, surprising.

He stared hard at the planet, and gave a small, slow bow. The victory was his, but the war would be long, and the outcome could be in doubt.

# REVIEWS

GAME REVIEW: OUTREACH
by
Lynn Willis

OUTREACH continues the game-universe originated by Redmond Simonsen in STARFORCE, the house relationship showing chiefly in counter design and movement rationale. STARFORCE was narrowly military, operational/tactical in scope, and broadened mainly by the reverence for life embedded in the rules; OUTREACH is a true FSL (future society level) game in which conflict is cultural, economic, etc., and the starfleets and stargates represent massed sentient activity, not merely ranked telesthetes, waiting to cast.

Components: 400 die-cut counters, four identical tables/interaction sheets; one die; one of the super SPI sorter boxes; one cover sheet (allusive, of a teleship bound for the great Andromeda galaxy...as on the STARFORCE cover, it is the good ship Simonsen, that PSL workhorse), and one 22 x 34 3-color schematic map of the known galaxy (as well as guesses, including the galatic core). Each hex is 1200 light years across and 1500 deep (that's right--some two billion cubic light years per hex). Hexes are graded by color in three levels of stellar density. Galactic nucleus hexes inhibit movement; beacon stars and dust clouds vary terrain and movement.

Game Sketch: Sequential movement; random player order each turn; movement enhanced by explorer fleets, stargates, civilization level, etc.; 2-D movement system by "shifts," not through adjacent hexes; fleets scatter if shifts exceed distance based on fleet type and technical level; stargates produce at one of five levels of development; starfleets can be regular (two convert to one gate), explorer (which augment movement and exploration), and dreadnought (which increase conflict capacity); autonomous forces; divide attacker's strength by defender's to resolve conflict; five lengthy (25- or 50-move) scenarios; solitaire version generates good interest, but the 4-player version is best; generational game-turns; competition between civilizations on a scale driving designers to hysterics.

Play sequence models the dynamics of expanding populations: Movement, Exploration (hex potential determined), Galactic Interrelation (contact, foreign policy, fleet conflict, stargate reduction); Fate (random socio-cultural results), and Resource Allocation (purchase, conversion, and augmentation of forces).

This may sound complicated, but OUTREACH is mechanically simple. Players complete most phases by simple actions or by one look at a table conveniently at hand. This is a smooth game.

Unfortunately the smoothness is achieved by over-trust. Admonitions pop up regarding the recording of X or Y, but no form is provided. STARFORCE's complexity stemmed from the belief that, if challenged, players should be able to prove the makeup of their forces. In OUTREACH one counter may represent any number and type of fleet and, while it is true that the continual-shift and approximate-conflict rules partially obviate the need for proof, in multiple-contact situations players with double-entry brains will find ample room to pull a fast one. Or two.

That is not a criticism. Cheating well in the company of cheaters becomes the most amusing and gratifying aspect of the multi-player game. The reviewer merely recommends the cheating be subtle and gracious: players who grossly flip-flop explorers and dreadnoughts deserve to roll an F on the Fate schedule.

To my knowledge, the Interaction Matrix/Display is a real innovation in design. It is a small matrix forcing each player to advocate a policy each game turn toward each of the other players--but the policy is modified by the policies of the other players, also advocated independently. Correct judgement is absolutely crucial. This simple matrix erases the normal 2 against 2 pattern of the 4-player game, and the idea is enthusiastically applauded.

OUTREACH is highly playable and wildly variable. Counting time in centuries, it is logical, realistic (though necessarily abstract--no character roles here, gang), and evocative. The components are a very high quality. Irad B. Hardy, designer; Redmond Simonsen, physical systems; B. E. Hessel, developer. SPI, $9.00.

GAME REVIEW:
GODS, DEMI-GODS AND HEROES
by
Glen Taylor

GODS, DEMI-GODS AND HEROES is the fourth and purportedly the last supplement to DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, the pioneer fantasy role-playing game which needs no introduction. As might be expected from such a "last bow," as it were, this newest supplement is different from all three of the previous ones, in a major way. Indeed, the supplement's own conception is that of a work intended to "set down guidelines that will enable you to incorporate a number of various mythologies into your game/campaign". This is by no means "standard" D & D material.

In GODS-DEMI-GODS AND HEROES you will find no new character classes, no new methods of resolving extant combat, or no new monsters or magical items. The supplement presents the deities of various cultures of Earth (and elsewhere!) in a form from which they can be easily assimilated into the existing D & D game structure. The mythos involved include the ancient Egyptian, the Indian, the Greek (of course), the Celtic, the Norse, the Finnish, the Central American Indian, and the Eastern (the coverage given to the latter two is scanty at best). Also included are creatures (I can't really call them deities) from Howard's Hyborea, and from "Eldric and the Melnibone." I'm no scholar of ancient (and modern!) legends, but it seems to me the authors have given a view of the various mythological concepts which is both panoramic and scrutinously detailed, and as complete as possible within the space limitations imposed (this is also the longest of the supplements at 72 pages). Kuntz and Ward have taken material which has come down to us in a sometimes distorted and almost always nebulous form, and clarified it into a solid body of material which would fit in well with any fantasy game.

In any adaptation of this type there is, to say the least, room for a lot of latitude in the way you interpret the source material. The authors freely admit that what is given here is only their interpretation of the myths, fully subject to change due to players' own ideas. They also strongly recommend further reading about all the material.

As for the material itself, it is superb. Gods (there is really no formal distinction between "gods," "demi-gods" and "heroes") are presented with the number of hit points, armor class, move, psionic abilities, etc in tabular form, then the special and unique abilities each god has are outlined. Often new spells, etc. are introduced and explained. The appearance of each god is also described. Since many of the mythos would be incomplete without a presentation of the various animals, monsters, etc. they contain, these are also presented, and most of them would put any but the most exquisitely fiendish monster from the "basic" game to shame. These include the Peacock of Karttekeza, Yama's Buffalo, Brahama's Goose, and the Fenris Wolf.

These beings are not omnipotent, but even a 20th level magic-used wouldn't stand a chance against most of them. This naturally raises the question of how the material is used. No formal codification of Divine Intervention rules, like the one in EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE, is contained here; the authors don't even suggest how to employ the gods, probably intending to leave it entirely up to the referee. This in turn raises several questions about philosophy and the way it relates to D & D. As I said, pitting the gods against players would be a farce. Perhaps the authors intend for the referee to use Divine Intervention (and retribution) freely whenever he feels the need to reward some valorous act or punish some sordid one. But this smacks of comic books and fairy tales, not legitimate swords-and-sorcery fiction. The consequences of an act in D & D should be incorporated into the act itself. Anyone who cops out on this is literally using a deus-ex-machina.

The few cases where the authors do give specifics about the intervention capabilities/proclivities of the gods, the information seems unreasonable. For instance, Bast, the Egyptian cat goddess, has a 40% chance of appearing whenever a member of the cat family is killed and either annihilating the offender or forcing him to serve her. This is absurd when you consider the number of feline monsters in the game, most of which have hellish dispositions.

I can only say that if the material in GODS, DEMI-GODS AND HEROES is taken by itself, it represents a stupendous labor of compilation and adaptation; but when you try to actually use it in a D & D campaign- well, I don't know. It seems that something should have been said about how this material was intended to be used or how the authors used it in their campaigns. This inadequacy isn't due to the material itself, which, as I have said, is excellent. It is rather due to the awesome capabilities of these beings. I doubt if more than a very few referees will feel entirely comfortable with actually using them.

This supplement's physical quality meets the high standards TSR has already set. The cover is in full color and portrays a scene of gods which might have been lifted directly off an Egyptian sarcophagus. The only thing I can complain about is the dearth of artwork. Aside from a full-page picture of Odin, there is very little. This is somewhat understandable due to the nature of the material, but I still wish there could have been more.

GODS, DEMI-GODS AND HEROES is available for $5 from TSR, and is worth it for the mere pleasure of reading it. For students of ancient legends it's a Type I treasure. It should much liven up any D & D campaign in which it is used, although I will create my own gods- after all, most D & D campaigns are not considered to be on earth. But my creations will be heavily influenced by, and patterned after, the material in this sweeping work.

## GAME REVIEW: BUFFALO CASTLE
by
Steve Jackson

One of the biggest problems faced by a fantasy gamer is solitude. It's really difficult to get into good role-playing by yourself (unless, of course, you're blessed with a split personality, i.e., "Some days I'm schizophrenic, but, then again, some days I'm not..."). Secrecy and surprise are the essence of fantasy role-playing. Which means a solitaire game is unsatisfying at best. Hah!

Rick Loomis of Flying Buffalo has shot down that problem once and for all. BUFFALO CASTLE is the first, and hopefully not the last, solitaire dungeon. And it works.

How did he do it? Simple. Buffalo Castle is actually a flowchart, done in booklet form. From the moment you enter the castle by one of three doors (shades of Monty Hall) you are faced with decisions. Do you want to fight that troll, talk to him, or just try to walk past? Each decision possibility refers you to a different coded result which tells you what happened, whether and how your character has to fight, and what your next decision possibilities are, i.e.: "You are in a short corridor that runs east & west. Make your saving roll. If you are successful, you may go east (go to 24D) or you may go west (go to 22C). If you miss your saving roll, go to 10C."

The various results are so thoroughly scattered through the book that, even though you can't help reading some before you get to them, there are so many possible events, and they are so scrambled, it doesn't ruin the game. BUFFALO CASTLE is well-written, with the wit and imagination that characterizes a really good FRP game. For instance... "You have tripped the "stink" trap. You are squirted with essence of skunk oil. Your charisma is reduced by 5 for the rest of this trip, and by 1 permanently..." or "It is impossible to get to (this number). You have cheated. You are instantly vaporized by the Dungeon Master!"

I can offer only two criticisms of Buffalo Castle. The first is of the production quality. This is Flying Buffalo average - that is to say, pretty awful. Mimeographed pages are okay in a $3 book, but a little proofreading would have been in order. A couple of typos are so bad you can't tell what was meant, and the most fiendish trap in the whole book is short-circuited by the inclusion of two 21Bs. (When you get the book, you should immediatly turn to page 21 and make a note at the top...when you get to 21B, roll the die. On a roll of 1-3, take the first 21B; on 4-6, take the second one.) The second edition will probably have the bugs out.

My second criticism is more a suggestion. The idea is so great that it deserves to be taken farther. BUFFALO CASTLE is a fairly simple dungeon, suitable only for exploration by first-level fighters, and then only once per fighter. (All the same, not everyone who goes in will get out.) I hope that Loomis, or somebody, or lots of somebodies, will come up with some complex flowchart dungeons. It could be done. Then you would have something suitable not only for solitaire play but also as a guidebook for a regular expedition, complete with Game Master.

BUFFALO CASTLE is $3 from Flying Buffalo, Inc., P.O.Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252. It is ONLY a dungeon; to play, you also need FRP rules. It was designed to work with TUNNELS AND TROLLS (also from Flying Buffalo); it will work with MONSTERS! MONSTERS! (Metagaming) with just a little adaptation. It could also be adapted to DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS (TSR), but would need a little more work, since the D & D system is different.

If you're into role-playing, you'll enjoy BUFFALO CASTLE. If you're into solo role-playing, buy it.

## REVIEW OF TRIPLANETARY VARIANT V/2
by
Kelly Moorman

This variant does much to add to the economic playing side of this popular SF game. It is an expansion on the suggestions made in the Prospecting Scenario in the Errate sheet of the Triplanetary rules. Some very interesting ideas have been added, which give the player a wide choice of ways to accumulate KiloCredits (KCs). He can do a combination of many things, one of which is establish a passenger line, for which there is a chart given in the variant rules for routes, number of turns required to accumulate passengers at the various planets, moons, and asteroids, as well as a listing of the fares to and from each of these.

Of course, at the first of the game, all the prospecting players begin evenly, a Space Patrol player being recommended for improving the game. The prospectors must begin prospecting immediately in order in start building up economic empires. Several new types of ships have been introduced in this variant, including s Sunship and a Bussard Ramscoop.

The players spread out from Ceres in the beginning, determining the economic worth of asteroids, then returning to Ceres to file claims. The ore that is gathered can be sold at various worlds for varying prices, or it can be processed into cordrazine at two processing centers (for a price, of course) and sold for higher prices elsewhere. Later, when a player has accumulated enough wealth, he can buy his own ore processor if he wishes.

The players must each form a corporation when a certain amount of wealth is achieved, which costs KCs, naturally. These corporations must have offices on different worlds to operate for them. They must pay annual income taxes to the Space Patrol, in addition to taxes paid each time a ship is built, for the protection the Patrol offers. The players may combine corporations if they want; or they may engage in Piracy, risking the loss of their corporations if caught; or when they have enough money to take on the Patrol, become an outlawed Warmonger in complete defiance of the Patrol's authority.

Violations of the law play a part in this variant also. If caught committing any crimes from a list of three classes of crimes, the players are tried, and punished according to the severity of the crime on a table. Of course, whether the player is convicted or not depends on his public relations points, which come from acts and deeds he has accomplished or committed throughout the game. Once again, the die result on the trial table can be adjusted through a successful (or unsuccessful) attempt to bribe the trial judge. If convicted, a player is fined or imprisoned according to the graded table.

One of the more interesting and imaginative ideas put forth in this variant is the existence of a 'Lloyds of Luna', which serves an obvious function. The game can be concluded any one of several previously agreed manners, or it can last almost indefinately.

I think you can see there is quite a bit of complex figuring and record-keeping involved, but many SF players seem to enjoy it all in the interests of realism. The level of realism achieved in this variant is remarkable. Turn by turn play is a bit slow, especially after the players build up a bit of wealth and get involved in different activities. Piracy can be attempted at any time by any player, but if caught, he'll lose his corporation. Also, kidnapping of passenger liners, cargoes, or even other players for ransom plays a part. The book keeping is the one real drawback, but I would recommend this variant to anyone interested in a very realistic space-economic-tactical game. Anyone wishing to be the J. Paul Getty of the 21st century, buy this one. After all, you're half way there by just buying this variant, which is a bargain in this hobby at $.75 (plus postage, I imagine). I bought mine in person at a convention, so I don't know how John handles postage.

It is printed in computer printout form, which is attractive if a little difficult to take care of. Naturally, the basic game of Triplanetary is necessary to play this variant. Variant V/2 is available from John Railing, P.O.Box 54, Clear Creek, Indiana 47426 for $.75.

# Letters

Space warfare may already have begun...with lasers. In the paper last week (on the back pages -- as are most things that have major potential but which are unspectacular) was a report that one US spy satellite had "gone blind" due to a brilliant flash, centered in it's viewing area. The official story was that it had been knocked out by the flames of an oil fire -- even though a maximum-brightness oil fire would only have 1/1500th of the brightness needed, and the fact that no other satellites surveying the area saw such a fire. But a good-sized laser shot into the camera lens would do the job quite nicely...and very probably did.

The article then went on to discuss the possibilities of "hunter/killer satellites," definately projected by both sides and possibly space borne already. Besides laser blinding, such satellites could use conventional projectile systems, too: a single bullet can easily render the average modern-day satellite useless. Most unmanned spacecraft are delicate things, and even the slightest error can ruin them -- during the 1960's came the realization that there are a lot of useless (though still-orbiting) spacecraft up there that could be fixed by a single twist of a screwdriver.

Something like this could make for a viable game, too -- suppose the year is 1985. The American player has space shuttles and a small but highly sophisticated network of hunter and killer satellites. The Russians will have one or two multiple-Salyut space stations and a larger number of combined function hunter/killers which are less efficient than the American's. There are also a large number of passive satellites, including both spy and neutral types. Each player knows only which satellites are his own, and the others may be Russian enemy spies of may be something else entirely (perhaps even Canadian or European ones). Also, new launches will be made each turn of all sorts of spacecraft, by all sides. The object is to render the other side's spacewarfare fleet ineffectual by knocking out hunters and spies, while avoiding the bad results of knocking out neutral satellites such as weather and astronomical satellites or non-participant ones, such as those owned by the Chinese or the French. And the worst thing of all you can do: kill someone. At present, the US has made no formal protest against killer satellites, nor has Moscow -- but if one life is lost in space, it'll be the international incident of the decade. One scenario might be as follows -- in some African nation, there is a bitter civil war which has been raging, say, since 1982. The US is giving support to one side in the form of arms supplies, while the Soviets have been giving support to the other side in the form of armaments plus satellite reports of enemy movements. The objective of the American -- to remove the Soviet "upper hand" (pun?) of satellite spying. The Soviet objective -- to maintain the spies long enough to score a victory over the American-allied ground forces below. (The game plays normally until a turn when, if the American hasn't yet won, a die is rolled -- if the result is a 1, the Soviets have won. If not, the play continues. The next turn, a 1 or 2 will end the game in favor of the Soviets -- the next turn, a 1, 2, or 3, etc. if the American hasn't won by the end of the six-turn series, then the Soviets gain an automatic victory.)

K. Allen Bjorke
Mpls, Mn.

While you're pressing onward with computer-plans, Micro-games, Hymenoptera and such, I think you'd better watch your flanks. SPI is fast moving forward in the SF area, traditionally yours and TSR's territory.

In 1974, SPI released it's classic STARFORCE. Then for two years it was dormant in the sf-f field. Early this year it releases SORCEROR, destined to be another classic. Several months later, it comes out with OUTREACH, tentatively rated higher than STERRAR CONQUEST! Early next year, STAR SOLDIERS will appear, and by the end of the year, BATTLEFLEET MARS will be out. There are rumors of even more such releases by SPI.

In my opinion, SPI is out to establish a beachhead in SF gaming. Also, the fact that OUTREACH was not designed by Redmond Simonsen shows that SPI is not afraid to go to outside sources for game ideas.

Mike Lazich
Burlingame, Ca.



The articles in TSG about laser weapons have been interesting. But one major point has been missed. If a gamma-ray or x-ray laser is used, it is potentially more deadly than a heat laser, because when it hits it will penetrate a shield of metal and destroy the electronic components within. X-rays and gamma-rays cause semiconductors (transistors, diodes, and ICS) to lose semiconducting properties, so they could knock out an opposing ship by knocking out their electronic instruments, making control almost inpossible. So it may be that the "cutting torch" laser will not be the most important in space warefare. Aiming these lasers should be no problem, since many mechanical devises have position tolerances of + 1 micron.

As novels seem to be good sources of inspiration for games, I feel Niven/Pournelle's The Mote in God's Eye is a great situation to game. The game could be a strategic game like SC with 1 player the Empire and 1 the Rebels (possibly a solitaire game) or a tactical/operational game covering a sector with several Rebels and a single Empire player.

Edmund C. Mack
Houston, Tx.

Charles R. Bowles seems to be on the right track in suggesting it is wrong (inefficient?) to colonize planets when moons, asteroids or systems are easier to handle in that you are not up against man's greatest block to a long and productive life--gravity. The Lagrangian motto will probably be: "You've never lived, until you've lived in a can!"

One of the elements of the starfaring-colonization games is how you really expect to send out ships with millions of people aboard. I'd sooner hypothesize that there will be few colonists and much cybernation. Starships will be people as much as they are machines (see Jack Chalker's A Jungle of Stars ). The people part of these cyberships will be schizoid in that they will have problems deciding whether they are the ship or the ship is them.

Suggestion: someone should make a microgame out of the first chapter of Doris Piserchia's A Billion Days of Earth. The action consists of a group of men being drafted right off the street, armed and trucked to a silo where the Zizzies (genetically developed combinations of honeybee, sparrow and housecat) have broken into one of the God's silos. The men must drive the zizzies away before the Gods arrive or be severely, and indiscriminately, punished. There are approximately three truckloads of men sent out one after the other and a fourth truck is armed with a flamethrower. The men must fight off the zizzies with rifles (bolt action type). The zizzies are about three feet long (not counting a poisonous stinger tail which kills if it strikes a man in the skull, the heart of juglar). Zizzies have a five foot wingspan and bite with suckers. They grasp and nip with two small claws. The men may use their rifles as clubs in close combat or when they run out of ammo. Each man has a steel claw to grasp (these men are genetically refined rats who would otherwise not have much in the way of grasp).

So approximately sixty men are attacked by two groups of zizzies in succession (approximately 200 zizzies per group). The men must cut down as many in the larger groups as possible. The battle goes hand to hand once the zizzies complete their first pass. The first of the zizziy groups hits and runs, then the second comes in, then zizzies come in as they get the chance.

This scenario, of course, would require attrition factors.

A Billion Days of Earth is, to put it mildly, a bizarre novel. It might be possible to make a larger game in which one player is Sheen (the Ego Eater who wants to take over the bodies of all the men by consuming their soul). With other players as a combination of the rich people of the planet with the Gods (human evolved into demi-gods).

More microgames are definitely needed if there are to be more wargamers. If the public is treated to too many complex and time-consuming games it won't respond very favorably.

John Robinson
Troy, N. Y.

To be blunt: I don't like the direction in which The Space Gamer is turning. My primary beef is derived from a notice on page 21 of TSG 8, which says that TSG and MC are not accepting any more orders from foreign countries. You may have a "good" reason for this, but right now, I'd prefer to shoot first and ask questions later.

From the subscription note on page 2 of the same issue, it seems that Canada's not a foreign country, in regard to that notice. No matter; that's SOP. Perhaps it makes bookkeeping easier to exclude overseas gamers from your mailing list; you may have other reasons. (eg. when you start your computer-moderated games, foreigners might feel they're playing-by-snail.) Whatever your excuse, it's not good enough.

Foreigners are people, too. When TSG first arrived at my home, it was like a breath of fresh air. Previously, I had acquired SF and F games piecemeal, never knowing what kind of quality I was getting because the reviewers didn't understand SF. To tantalize people for a year and then cut them short is cruel; I appeal to your sense of fendom. If you isolate TSG within the US/Canada, I feel it will hurt your reputation immeasureably. (I personally may start a hate campaign, comparing you to the people who cancelled Star Trek, etc.) Please reconsider your position.

The other complaint is your apparent preoccupation with instituting a pbm-computer game series. The basic idea isn't bad, so long as you don't neglect conventional games in the process. I'm not too keen on some of the ideas coming out of the project feedback column. My first reaction was about as follows: "Player rankings? Tournaments? Cash prizes? What kind of glory-seeking clowns do they think we are?" I've just started one of Flying Buffalo's games, and their magazine hinted at some of these phenomena, but I didn't think TSG was into them too. I think the entire recognition/status scene destroys the whole idea behind games: the play's the thing. In my club, we don't worry about winning, we're just there to have fun. So long as people are willing to learn the rules to a game, we don't care if they're tactical idiots; they'll learn. Prises and ratings are an ego trip which spoils the game.

One more point: I disagree that computer-moderated games are more demanding, and that computer-opponents are more intelligent or tougher. Perhaps conceptualizing a computer simulation is more difficult for the individual player, but I think a board version of most such games would be easier to play (excepting the paperwork, which is merely tiresome). Try computerizing Strategy I or Tunnels and Trolls sometime. It doesn't work.

Norman S. Howe
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada

I would like to comment on Steve Jackson's article on TRIPLANETARY, he is definitely right that mines are underpowered weapons. On the other hand, I have found it difficult to torpedo an opponent who is expecting it and can accelerate away; then you must guess which way he is going to accelerate. Since a ship can launch only one torpedo per turn; you must use a squadron or a group for a good chance and you are vulnerable yourself. There are many ways to introduce Simoves into Triplanetary; I use the fact that the hexes are numbered SPI style coupled with a system of letters for direction in the six hexes around the sun. Fire and movement are plotted and then resolved, with the ordinance phase before movement. We use the plastic overlay to protect the map, and to figure out outrageous movements and velocity differences for firing passes. Steve's comments on asteroids and rendezvous are well taken; and I have never considered minor repair possible except at a base. (Though truly minor repairs could be conducted in orbit with the right equipment and engineering types.) The problem of "Heroism" has bothered me ever since, as a patrol ship I rendezvoued with a disabled ship that was plunging into the sun; all I could think of was to rescue the crew, as my opponent objected to me towing it at no extra fuel cost; I like his alternatives.

James S. Evans
Winooski, VT.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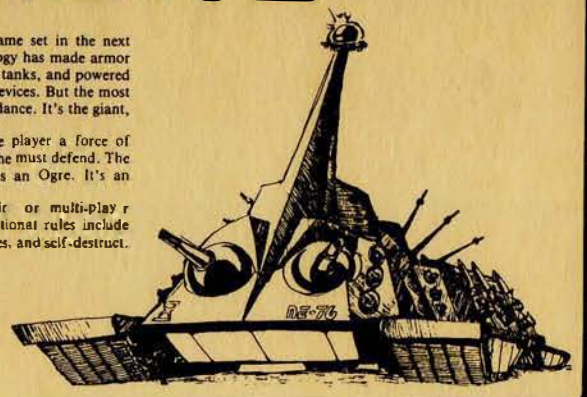

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